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INTERFERENCE OF GREEK LEARNERS' NATIVE LANGUAGE IN THEIR WRITTEN PERFORMANCE OF ENGLISH VERB TENSES

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Abstract

The main focus of this study is on depicting, classifying and evaluating instances of contextually erroneous verb tense use in the English language as a result of negative transfer from the native language (Modern Greek). In the first chapter, the researcher attempts a definition of the notion of language transfer and provides a detailed account of the linguistic evolution of the transfer concept from its origin in behaviourism up to recent studies that view interference as being a fundamental part of the interlanguage formation and implementation process. The various types of language transfer are also stated in the first chapter and a thorough analysis in relation to how and when language transfer occurs is provided. The second chapter involves a definition of contextual grammar and its role and function regarding negative transfer as well as a detailed account of the use of verb tenses in both English and Greek and consequently states and classifies the differences in verb tense use between the two languages that could originate negative transfer in L2 performance. The third chapter refers to the reasons and criteria for the verb tense interference test design and implementation and presents the negative transfer error classification system which has been established and applied throughout the L2 data analysis process. In the fourth chapter, the interference data are analysed in terms of error distribution in the interference test and in samples of free writing, in relation to the type of activity of the interference test and the country in which Greek native speakers are currently studying (Greece and Scotland). The distribution of calques (as the most frequently occurring type of interference error) is also included in the fourth chapter as a result of the analysis of the interference tests in contrast to samples of free writing. The last chapter (the fifth one) presents an evaluation of the interference test and its findings in relation to the role of age, formal instruction and type of activity in the occurrence of negative transfer in L2 performance.

To my parents

Greek the language they gave me
Poor the house on Homer's shores
My only care my language
On Homer's shores

Odysseus Elytis

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Introduction

The topic refers to the notion of L1 interference in L2 performance, which is identified as the psychological or cognitive process of the learner's native language being transferred in his attempt to acquire or communicate in the target language. L1 (native language) interference could be traced in the production stage of the process, in the performance of L2 (target language) learners. The hypothesis involved in this study is that Greek learners' native language interferes in their written production of the English language and particularly in their written performance of verb tenses. However, the focus of this study is not on morphological verb tense structures that are being transferred in L2 throughout learners' attempt to attain effective communication; the hypothesis stated in this study refers to Greek native speakers' tendency to apply L1 criteria for verb tense contextual selection and application in the L2 due to differences in contextual grammar between Greek (L1) and English (L2).

The importance of the topic could be valued as multi-dimensional. Greek learners' errors in English verb tenses are important to all teachers working in the Greek private sector, including myself. Greek teachers come across interference verb tenses errors in their students' writings practically on an everyday basis and can not be certain how these errors have originated and consequently what are the possible techniques that could enable students to overcome them. This study could also assist Greek teachers in tracing interference errors in students' performance of verb tenses and what could have caused them. This thesis could therefore enable students to achieve non-erroneous contextual use of English verb tenses by highlighting the fact that the Greek verb tense context should be under no circumstances used as a prototype for contextual grammar in English. It is important to point out that in the Greek private sector, teachers are not hired after a homogeneous nationality criterion and I have known many teachers from various national and cultural backgrounds who are happily engaged in the Greek private sector. This study could thus be useful for people of various nationalities since it does not refer only to the Greek language but to the Greek teaching context which could be familiar to many people all over the world. Teachers working in the Greek private sector, however, are not the only people that read or mark Greek students' writings. As many Greek students are taking undergraduate and postgraduate courses in most parts of the English speaking world,

this study may therefore be of interest to teachers of all levels who come across and have to mark Greek students' writings.

The Greek language is probably the least researched one in the field of cross-linguistic influence and overall contrastive analysis and therefore this study aims at investigating aspects of contextual grammar in relation to negative transfer in both Greek and English presenting thus a research related to a common and yet innovative topic. Since Greek is a highly inflected language, there is actually very little research concerning the context in which grammar occurs. The contribution of this thesis in the evolution and enrichment of linguistic research is identified as the attempt to present how each structure could be unique for application in a specific context and to account for negative transfer in potential misuse of contextually oriented verb tense structures from Modern Greek to English. Moreover, the hypothesis stated in this study implies that interference is not a linguistic consequence of the L2 acquisition process that needs to be condemned but a fundamental part of interlanguage which seems to occur more frequently in certain types of activities or certain groups of people but independently of age, academic background or amount of formal instruction. However, before one provides any sort of assumptions in relation to the nature, function and occurrence of negative transfer, it is essential to commence this innovative project by investigating the very notion of interference in terms of origin and psychological or cognitive implementation.

CHAPTER ONE: LANGUAGE TRANSFER

1.1 Defining language transfer.

The notion of language transfer seems rather controversial and complicated in its own nature and definition and has been the driving force of various debates in the literature of both linguistics and psychology. A definition of language transfer commonly used by various scholars, researchers and linguists refers to the influence or 'the effect of one language on the learning of another' (Richards&Schmidt, 1985:294). A major issue in defining language transfer seems to be the identification of the language whose elements could be transferred in the production of the target language (commonly known as L2), which in our specific context is the English language. It is therefore of the utmost importance to clarify and decide on whether it is only the learner's native language that could affect the L2 production or any other previously acquired language.

According to the Behaviourist learning theory which originated the transfer theory itself, language transfer or interference occurred during the L2 acquisition process as old habits prohibit the acquisition of new ones, a process known as proactive inhibition: 'proactive inhibition occurred when old habits got in the way of attempts to learn new ones' (Ellis, 1994:299). By old habits behaviourists referred to the linguistic forms and structures of the learner's native language (commonly known as L1) which proved to be rather harmful in the acquisition process of L2 structures and forms since they interfered with those of the L2 and resulted in their transfer to the target language production. Although the emphasis of the behaviourist definition of language transfer was on the influence of the native language, L1 transfer was not viewed as exclusively harmful; language transfer could be either positive-when the target language structure produced is identical to the equivalent of the L1-or negative, when the L2 structure produced is viewed as erroneous due to native language interference (Ellis, 1994:300). As the transfer theory was reviewed and re-examined over the years by various linguists, it was somehow detached from the psychological profile attributed by the Behaviourist theory and was thus defined as the influence of

either the native language or any other previously acquired language in the acquisition and production of the target language. 'Transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired' (Odlin, 1989:27). According to the above definition, transfer could be originated by any previously acquired language and not exclusively by the learner's mother tongue. The use of the words 'similarities' and 'differences' seems to refer to positive and negative transfer, a distinction also integrated in the behaviourists' definition and traced in the outcome of the L2 production.

Another aspect that has to be taken into consideration when defining language transfer is the duality of options that a learner has in both in L1 and L2 before implementing or producing target language structures and items. According to Selinker, any target language learner needs to be able to choose between two linguistic structures in his native language. If a frequently employed native language structure could be parallelised with a frequently used interlanguage structure, then it is the case when L1 language transfer occurs: 'a preliminary step in this regard is for the descriptive analyst to judge that he is facing a situation in which only two alternate choices exist for the speaker in each of the two languages. The analyst is thus working within what might be called a *two-choice schema*…whenever there are such binary choices, language transfer may be operationally defined as a process occurring from the native to the foreign language if frequency analysis shows that a statistically significant trend in the speaker's native language appears towards one of these two alternatives, which is then paralleled by a significant trend toward the same alternative in the speaker's interlanguage behaviour' (Selinker, 1969:90).

Apart from the definition of language transfer, the terminology itself seems rather controversial among various linguists. For some researchers, the term *interference* seems more appropriate but according to Odlin, the notion of interference refers to the case when some L1 structures or elements prohibit the acquisition of the equivalent L2 structures and elements, a hypothesis which is clearly beviourist-oriented. Transfer in general can not be equated to interference; the term *interference* can only be used as synonymous to the term *negative transfer* (Odlin, 1989:26). However, the terms *interference, negative transfer* and *positive transfer* may be viewed as solid and applicable by the majority of linguists but not as free from any theoretical implications. According to some researchers, the theory of language

transfer could not incorporate L2 acquisition phenomena such as avoidance, borrowing or code-switching and it is thus more appropriate to use the term *cross-linguistic influence:* ' this term allows for the influence of second or other languages as well as for the influence of non-native languages on the learner's own L1' (Smith, 1983:193). However, since the purpose of this paper is to focus on the phenomenon of language transfer from Greek (L1) verb tenses' structures to English (L2) verb tenses production and not on various other aspects of second language acquisition, I will be using the terms negative transfer and interference interchangeably. All the above terms and definitions will be further clarified through a detailed analysis of the origin of language transfer.

1.2 The origin of language transfer: from behaviourism to the Interlanguage hypothesis.

The behaviourist theory of second language learning was formed on a psychological basis according to which the mastery of the target language could be explained by examining and observing the behaviour of learners to particular stimuli. The core hypothesis of behaviourism was that second language learning was the result of habit-formation conducted either through imitation or through reinforcement: 'a habit was formed when a particular stimulus became regularly linked with a particular response…if the stimulus occurred sufficiently frequently, the response became practised and therefore automatic' (Ellis, 1985:21). According to the behaviourist view, habit-formation was the key to both L1 and L2 acquisition and since no differences had been identified in these two processes, language transfer was being attributed to old habits: 'native language influence was thus the influence of old habits, some potentially helpful, some potentially harmful' (Odlin, 1989:15). Negative transfer was thus attributed to proactive inhibition when errors in the L2 production occurred and consequently positive transfer was demonstrated when the learning habits were identical in both native and target language. Similarities and differences between L1 and L2 were viewed as enhancing or inhibiting the target language acquisition process accordingly: 'thus differences between the first and second language create learning difficulty which results in errors, while the similarities between the first and second language facilitate rapid and easy learning' (Ellis,

1985:22). In the case of L2 acquisition, the old and harmful habits were referred to as linguistic knowledge of L1 structures and forms which had to be unlearnt in order to master the new, L2 linguistic knowledge. As far as target language acquisition is concerned, the notion of 'unlearning' seemed extremely complicated if not impossible and this exact learning implication was considered the source of difficulty in acquiring target language structures[1] (Ellis, 1994:300). Negative transfer, however, did not result only from prior L1 knowledge according to the behaviourist theory but also from the psychology-originated concept of transfer of training which was defined as 'the effect of a *preceding* activity upon the learning of a given task' (Osgood in Selinker, 1969:68). This argument was questioned and rejected by Selinker who pointed out that as far as negative transfer is concerned 'the linguistic and psychological parameters do not overlap' (Selinker, 1969:69). As negative transfer was manifested through learners' errors and interference was frowned upon as damaging and delaying the L2 acquisition, errors in behaviourist theory were considered highly unacceptable. Erroneous production was the manifestation of negative transfer and the notion of interference itself was treated as unwelcome by the behaviourists-even though they were the first to elaborate the theory of transfer- since it did not permit the very existence of proactive inhibition: 'in behaviourist accounts of SLA, errors were considered undesirable. They were evidence of non-learning, of the failure to overcome proactive inhibition. Some language teaching theorists even suggested that there was a danger of errors becoming habits in their own right if they were tolerated' (Ellis, 1985:22).

The behaviourist approach to language transfer was questioned and ultimately rejected by various linguists and researchers who could not relate their views to the psychological basis attributed to interference. It has been pointed out that it is scientifically groundless to compare psychological experiments on animals' behaviour to human linguistic behaviour: 'the terms *stimulus* and *response* were exposed as vacuous where language behaviour was concerned. *Analogy* could not account for the language user's ability to generate totally novel utterances' (Ellis, 1994:300). Cognitive accounts of language acquisition demonstrated that the process of L1 acquisition was developmental in its own nature rather than a result of mere habit-

[1] The notion that learners face difficulties in acquiring L2 structures due to their differences with the equivalent structures of the L1 and therefore reach a point of learning stabilization which they will find

formation and Chomsky's widely accepted theory of universal grammar pointed out that individuals have an innate predisposition to language learning: 'these studies suggested that language acquisition was developmental in nature, driven as much, if not more, form the inside as from the outside' (Ellis, 1994:300). The process of L1 acquisition is no longer considered identical to that of L2 and in the late 1960's researchers stated that one of the major differences between the native and target language acquisition process is the manifestation of cross-linguistic influences: 'the challenges that arose in that period were largely in reaction to two claims that American scholars had made about transfer in the preceding twenty or so years. The first of those claims was that the existence of cross-linguistic differences made second language acquisition extremely different from first language acquisition' (Odlin, 1989:15). The cognitive view of the developmental nature of language which made a clear distinction between L1 and L2 acquisition in terms of cross-linguistic differences was the driving force in the foundation of contrastive analysis and consequently in the development of the transfer theory which was clearly stated as the tendency of individuals 'to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture' (Lado in James, 1980:14). Cognitive accounts of language learning seem to acknowledge the existence and occurrence of language transfer: 'on the contrary, from a cognitivist point of view it makes considerable sense to assume that learners in principle make use of any prior linguistic knowledge they may have as *input* to the creative construction process, one important source being their L1; (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:111).

As opposed to behaviourism which viewed errors as sins that had to be excluded from the learner's performance, linguists' papers in the 1960's state that errors are indispensable and invaluable to the target language learning process. Corder pointed out that errors are important to the teacher because they will enable him to evaluate the student's progress and realise what are the remaining L2 elements to be mastered. Errors are also important not only to the researcher as a sort of solid evidence in relation to the learning strategies or procedures employed by the student but also to the learner himself since making errors could be considered as a technique, a device that learners employ in order to acquire language(Richards, 1984:25). Corder

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difficult to overcome, could be considered as a primitive form of the currently employed term of

made also a very important distinction in error classification that follows the Chomskian distinction between competence and performance; errors should be therefore classified as either competence ones or as performance ones which could also be termed as mistakes: 'the errors of performance will characteristically be unsystematic and the errors of competence systematic. It will be useful therefore hereafter to refer to errors of performance as mistakes, reserving the term error to refer to the systematic errors of the learner form which we are able to reconstruct his knowledge of the language to date' (Richards, 1984:25). Erroneous L2 production is no longer viewed as harmful and is the actual manifestation of language transfer but it is rather complicated for the contrastive analyst to decide whether the production specimen includes errors or mistakes.

The issue of how errors occur-as evidence of language transfer and L2 acquisition in general- and how they should be classified and dealt with led linguists and researchers to form and define the notion of interlanguage: 'an *interlanguage* may be linguistically described using as data the observable output resulting from a speakers' attempt to produce a foreign norm. It is assumed that such behaviour is highly structured. In comprehensive language transfer work, it seems to me that recognition of the existence of an interlanguage cannot be avoided and that it must be dealt with as a system, not as an isolated collection of errors' (Selinker, 1969:71). The broadly and commonly used term *interlanguage* refers to 'the existence of a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a target language norm' (Richards, 1984:35). According to Ellis, learners have the tendency to construct several hypotheses about the target language and apply this alleged knowledge in several given occasions in order to find out if their speculations about L2 grammar are true: 'the principle tenet of interlanguage theory, that the learner constructs for himself a series of hypotheses about the grammar of the target language and consciously or unconsciously tests these out in formal or informal learning contexts, has withstood the test of both speculation and considerable empirical research' (Ellis, 1982:205). Various researchers and linguists like Corder suggested that learners construct their interlanguage system in order to clarify and ensure that the L2 systems are or are not the same with those of the L1 and that the learner's native language therefore acts as the starting point of the

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fossilization , introduced by Larry Selinker.

L2 acquisition process (Ellis, 1982:205). It is therefore not groundless to assume that since the mother tongue is the starting point of the L2 acquisition it could enhance or inhibit the process and thus somehow interfere in the acquisition process, either positively or negatively.

The role of language transfer in the creation and manifestation of interlanguage was stated by Selinker in his 1972 paper about interlanguage. Selinker views interlanguage as being originated from the activation of a 'different though still genetically determined structure, referred to here as the latent psychological structure, whenever they attempt to produce a sentence in the second language' (Richards, 1984:34). This latent psychological structure involves five central psycholinguistic processes that result in interlanguage behaviour and the very first one of these processes is the language transfer (the other four are transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication and overgeneralization of target language material). According to Selinker's interlanguage hypothesis, the manifestation and result of language transfer in L2 production is referred to as *fossilization*, a notion used to describe a mechanism that exists in the latent psychological structure. 'Fossilizable linguistic phenomena are linguistic items, rules and subsystems which speakers of a particular native language will tend to keep in their interlanguage relative to a particular target language, no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the target language' (Richards, 1984:36). Fossilization can therefore result from language transfer if one can demonstrate that fossilizable items that occur in the interlanguage (also known as IL) production result from the native language. However, it is important to point out that fossilization could be also originated from an individual's isolation from the target language but only in the case when students were considered to have mastered the L2: 'isolation from a language which learners had known quite well before might result in their reaching a freezing point beyond which there is no further development' (Berman&Olshtain, 1983:232). In our specific context though, learners are still involved in the L2 acquisition process and the focus of this paper is negative language transfer which could result in potential fossilization but not due to linguistic isolation. It is also of the utmost importance to keep in mind that interlanguage does not refer only to a system derived from a latent psychological structure but also to the observable product derived from the output of learner's production: 'in one sense, like the word *language* itself, IL denotes a product: it is the

outcome of language use. Hence it is useful to speak of the IL product and of IL systems. IL, in the first sense, is not a state of mind, then, but the manifestation of some system or coordinated set of systems. To IL there have to be features either in the manifestation (the observable product), or by hypothesis, in what led to that product, which differentiate the use form a native speaker of that language' (Bialystok&Smith, 1985:101). Language transfer should therefore be examined not only as a process that results in interlanguage production and potentially in fossilization but also as an observable product traced in the learners' output of the target language. And it is for that reason that it is of the utmost importance to attempt a psychological and cognitive account for the occurrence of language transfer.

1.3 How language transfer occurs.

In order to examine how language transfer occurs in oral or written production of the target language, it is essential to consider if interference is an option which is made consciously or unconsciously by the L2 learner. In the case when interference occurs consciously, as a kind of learning strategy, the learner usually resorts to transfer as a communication technique, a solution to an L2 communication problem. If a student does not know how to express himself in the target language he is likely to resort to mother tongue forms and structures: 'in particular, studies of L2 speakers' use of communication strategies have shown that learners often resort to their L1 intentionally to solve lexical communication problems in the L2' (Poulisse&Bongaerts, 1994:36). Negative transfer or interference, however, may be traced as the learner's unconscious decision to employ L1 structures and forms due to his own assumption that certain L1 structures are identical to the equivalent L2 ones and therefore applicable in L2 production: 'without question, the influence arises from a learner's conscious or unconscious judgement that something in the native language (most typically) and something in the target language are similar, if not actually the same' (Odlin, 1989:27). However, apart from a psychological description (conscious or unconscious transfer) of how transfer occurs, it would also be essential to provide a cognitive account for the existence and occurrence of language transfer.

Any attempt to examine the cognitive process of language transfer should include a description and definition of the terms *declarative* and *procedural*

knowledge: 'declarative knowledge comprises the language user's knowledge of linguistic rules and elements, including pragmatic and discourse knowledge, in one or more languages. This type of knowledge is *static*, in that it is independent of its use for communicative purposes in real time' (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:115). Since any individual's declarative knowledge is static, it can not be activated immediately but only through certain procedures that have the power to trigger parts or bits of it in language reception, production and learning. The sum of these procedures that are empowered to activate declarative knowledge are referred to as procedural knowledge and this second type of knowledge may seem free of linguistic content but does not necessarily function independently of declarative knowledge, forming thus an interrelation and interdependence connection with the activated declarative knowledge (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:115). In the case of L1 language production, L1 declarative knowledge is being activated through the procedural knowledge which is equated to L1 communication. The result of this activation is that a part of declarative knowledge is employed which is viewed as primarily utilizable in the given circumstance (fig.1). 'The declarative knowledge which is primarily utilized in a given communicative situation could be referred as *primary declarative knowledge'* (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:115).

L1

Declarative knowledge

L1 communication

Primary declarative knowledge

(fig.1: function of L1 declarative knowledge)

In the case of interlanguage production, the learner's primary declarative knowledge can be equated to their interlanguage but it is possible that he may also

activate another part of his declarative knowledge which is of secondary importance and status (secondary declarative knowledge, fig.2) and which is usually originated by his L1 or by any previously acquired language (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:115). The occurrence of language transfer can be therefore explained as the process according to which the learner's procedural knowledge selects and activates both primary and secondary declarative knowledge in interlanguage production so that the outcome includes both interlanguage and native language elements and forms. 'The only difference between transfer and other planning procedures in thus that transfer combines secondary with primary declarative knowledge (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:115).

L2

Declarative knowledge

IL communication

Primary declarative knowledge (IL) **Secondary declarative knowledge (L1)**

(fig.2: function of L2 declarative knowledge)

It is important to point out that neither of the two types of knowledge absorbs or diminishes the existence of the other but co-exist and are combined in order to account for interference. However, apart from examining the existence and occurrence of language transfer in L2 production, it would also be useful to investigate possible classifications of language transfer and consequently the types of this notion as they appear in learner's observable output.

1.4 Types of language transfer.

A primary distinction and classification of language transfer refers to the languages that take part in the interference process in terms of source and reception. When the influence occurs from the second or target language on a previously acquired language-which is usually the mother tongue-then the appropriate term is borrowing transfer whereas in the case of the influence being originated from the native language to the target language acquisition, the term commonly applied is substratum transfer (Odlin, 1989:12). Borrowing transfer usually begins at the lexical level and could gradually result to L1 lexical attrition whereas substratum transfer-which is likely to occur regardless of how many languages the students already knows-seems more evident in L2 pronunciation and syntax. Another distinction of language transfer is that of synchronic and diachronic transfer, a dichotomy based on the time framework, the starting point of interference. Synchronic transfer is assumed to take place at the very moment language is produced or received; diachronic transfer, on the other hand, refers to a specific instance of language reception or production that is traced in the learner's observable output and exhibits native language positive or negative influence. According to diachronic transfer, the interference procedure was activated at an earlier point in the past and it resulted in the formation of interlanguage rules and items that are traceable in learner's production of the L2 (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:112).

The most common and frequent classification of language transfer is implemented by linguists and researchers according to the effect that the native language has in the production of the L2 (positive-negative transfer). In the case when the learner's mother tongue seems to enhance the target language learning process due to its similarities in structure and form with the target language, the appropriate and applicable term is positive transfer: 'the effects of positive transfer are only determinable through comparisons of the success of groups with different native languages. Such comparisons often show that cross-linguistic similarities can produce positive transfer in several ways. Similarities between native language and target language vocabulary can reduce the time needed to develop good reading

comprehension and similarities in syntactic structures can facilitate the acquisition of grammar' (Odlin, 1989:36). Negative transfer, on the other hand, which refers to native (or any previously acquired) language interference accounting for erroneous production of L2, involves various types of errors that differentiate the learner's performance from that of a native speaker. The first negative transfer error type is underproduction: 'learners may produce very few or no examples of a target language structure. There is good evidence for one form of underproduction related to language distance: avoidance. If learners sense that particular structures in the target language are very different from counterparts in the native language, they may try to avoid using those structures' (Odlin, 1989:37). Another type of negative transfer erroneous production is overproduction which could be viewed as a consequence of underproduction; learners therefore tend to overproduce various structures in order to avoid using others which occur rather infrequently in their L1 (Odlin, 1989:37). Negative transfer can also be traced in the form of misinterpretation according to which learners tend to receive and interpret L2 under the influence of L1 forms and elements and consequently misinterpret very often the target language received message. Similarities and differences between the mother tongue and native language could result in the most frequently occurring error type of negative transfer known as production errors. Such errors of L2 production include alterations of structures, substitutions and calques: 'substitutions involve a use of native language forms in the target language (e.g. *Now I live home with my parents. But sometimes I must go bort-* the Swedish word for *away*) whereas calques are errors that reflect very closely a native language structure' (Odlin, 1989:37).

Selinker's definition of positive and negative transfer is related to the two-schema theory, the duality of options in both L1 and IL, according to which he defined language transfer in the first place. Thus he claims that positive transfer can be defined as 'a process which occurs whenever there is a statistically significant predominance in the native language of one of two alternative linguistic entities, which is then paralleled by such predominance in an analysis of the attempted production of a foreign language, the predominant entity being a nonerror since it concurs with an experimentally established norm of that foreign language' (Selinker, 1969:91). Consequently, negative transfer is a process according to which the predominant linguistic entity of the native language is paralleled to the equivalent interlanguage one and is classified as an error since it deviates from the established L2

norm. Selinker introduces a third type of transfer, the neutral transfer which occurs 'whenever there is no statistical predominance in the native language of either of two alternative linguistic entities, which is then paralleled by a lack of predominance in an analysis of the attempted production of a foreign language, one alternative linguistic entity being a nonerror since it concurs with an experimentally established norm of that foreign language and the other being an error since it deviates from that norm' (Selinker, 1969:91).

An extremely interesting classification of language transfer in relation to the degree of attention and automatization involved in the language production procedure can be traced in the three following types of transfer suggested by Faerch and Kasper: automatic transfer, strategic transfer and subsidiary transfer. The notion of automatic transfer refers to the activation of automatized elements from learner's secondary declarative knowledge in instances of language production that his attention is focused on something else. It usually occurs when L1 and IL structures strive each for its occurrence and it is the case when the L1 structure is finally imposed and produced in the target language (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:127). Automatic transfer therefore seems to occur as an unconscious process whereas strategic transfer takes place consciously as a type of communication technique employed by learners: 'when language users experience problems in establishing or executing a speech plan because relevant linguistic means are either unavailable or currently unaccessible, they will attempt to solve the problem by means of a communication strategy. In IL use, one possible solution is to activate declarative knowledge from a secondary area. This type of highly controlled transfer will be referred to as strategic transfer' (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:128). One could therefore assume that in the case of strategic transfer, the learner's attention is focused on the issue of the L2 production and the learner himself is consciously working towards the solution of potential problems in L2 use and communication. Subsidiary transfer differs from strategic one in relation to the attention during the process of target language production. Subsidiary transfer occurs in an instance when there is focused attention neither on the interlanguage system activated nor on the L1 linguistic (secondary declarative) knowledge that is being transferred. Consequently, the fundamental distinction between subsidiary and automatic transfer is that 'the latter involves the activation of a compiled sub-plan in the L1, whereas this is not the case with subsidiary transfer' (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:129). However, having examined all the various distinctions and classifications

in relation to the types of language transfer, it would be quite essential to investigate the potential instances in which transfer is most likely to occur.

1.5 When language transfer occurs.

According to various researchers and linguists, there are certain features and structures of the target language which seem highly susceptible to transfer: 'by contrast, there are features of the second language which are highly susceptible to attrition, and which soon show mother-tongue patterns of transfer. These include command of lexical items of different kinds, are well as deeply-ingrained and typologically significant structural properties of English, such as word-order constraints' (Berman&Olshtain, 1983:233). Apart from any assumption or prediction regarding the L2 elements that are susceptible to language transfer, researchers have pointed out that there are two major criteria that could account for L1 structures' transferability in both written and oral production of the target language and they are identified as linguistic and psycholinguistic criteria. According to the linguistic criteria in relation to L1 transferability, learners tend to transfer bearing in mind the degree of difficulty of several structures and forms, a notion known as typological markedness: 'a phenomenon A in some language is more marked than B if the presence of A in a language implies the presence of B; but the presence of B does not imply the presence of A' (Eckman in Faerch&Kasper, 1987:121). The degree of L1 and L2 markedness in addition to their degree of similarity and difference can function as a transferability predictor; still, typological markedness is not the only factor that can account for transferability: the interaction of language universals with variables such as the degree of correspondence between the native language and the target language or the explicitness and conformity of the transferred structure to the underlying logical structure is another aspect of the linguistic criteria that provide an account for L1 transferability (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:121).

The notion of psycholinguistic criteria refers to transferability factors such as psychotypology, psycholinguistic markedness and reasonable entity principle. The notion of psychotypology, introduced by Kellerman, refers to the process where individuals tend to transfer elements from their L1 to the target language only if the target language's elements and forms seem similar or related to their mother tongue, avoiding thus transfer to a language whose systems are completely different from the

equivalent of their own native language (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:123). The notion of psycholinguistic markedness refers to the situation where any L1 feature is viewed as non-transferable, as marked 'if it is perceived as infrequent, irregular, semantically or structurally opaque, or in any other way exceptional' (Kellerman in Faerch&Kasper, 1987:123). The degree of markedness of any L1 feature will enable the learner to decide whether the feature is exceptional, specific and thus non-transferable or rather neutral and thus transferable. Learners therefore tend to transfer L1 elements which are not striking or extraordinary but also seem reasonable to exist in the target language as well: 'by reasonable entity principle, it is meant that in the absence of specific knowledge about the L2, the learner will attempt to maximalise the systematic, the explicit and the logical in his interlanguage, thereby treating the L2 as a reasonable entity' (Faerch&Kasper, 1987:123). Thus, any L1 structures that are viewed or assumed by the learners as logical to be employed in L2 production are due to transferability.

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a review of the literature in relation to the notion of language transfer by presenting a detailed account of the origin of transfer-which is the focus of our study-as well as of the various types of language transfer according to different classification criteria. It has also presented the process according to which interference occurs and various types of criteria that account for transferability of L1 structures and forms in L2 production. Since the focus of my study is the transfer of Greek L1 verb tenses in the production of English L2 verb tenses, it is rather essential to investigate the similarities and differences of these two languages in terms of verb tenses' formation and production.

CHAPTER TWO: NEGATIVE TRANSFER AS A RESULT OF GREEK VERB TENSES USE IN THE PRODUCTION OF ENGLISH VERB TENSES.

2.1 The role of grammar in relation to negative transfer.

Any attempt to investigate the notion of interference or negative transfer is or could be related to a particular aspect of language in order to produce a more focused study of the cross-linguistic phenomenon. However, any aspect of language production can be viewed as grammar and thus whatever the field of language in which negative transfer can be traced, interference is traced, originated and therefore related to the grammar of a language: 'the grammar includes everything speakers know about their language-the sound system, called phonology; the system of meanings, called semantics; the rules of word formation, called morphology; and the rules of sentence formation, called syntax. It also, of course, includes the vocabulary of words-the dictionary or lexicon' (Fromkin&Rodman, 1998:18). This definition, however, is merely employed by the majority of English language learners who tend to view grammar as including only morphological and syntactic rules. However, verb morphology is not the focus of our study since 'transfer may occur at all levels but morphology seems to be less affected than other areas' (Benson, 2002:69). The purpose of this paper is to investigate how L1 contextual grammar[2] patterns can be transferred in L2 written production of English verb tenses resulting thus to potentially grammatical but contextually vague or inappropriate utterances. By contextual grammar, one could refer not to the formation of verb tenses structures but to the criteria of selection and implementation of verb tenses in relation to the time framework and overall context in oral or written language production. Consequently, the hypothesis stated is that Greek native speakers tend to use verb tenses in their written production of the English language which are not appropriate to the English language context. However, before analysing any data on instances of negative

[2] The term *contextual grammar,* used in this paper, is a slightly modified version of the term *context-sensitive grammar* which is referred to as 'a form of phrase structure grammar which is not subject to the restriction that defines a context-free grammar-according to which each rule holds for a specific category regardless of context' (Matthews, 1997:73).

transfer in L2 contextual grammar in order to examine the validity of the above hypothesis, it is rather essential to provide a brief account of how verb tenses are being employed in both English and Greek language.

2.2 The use of English verb tenses.

The role of tenses in English language production is related to the individual's attempt to refer to actions or incidents in a specific time framework. The fundamental confusion for the majority of English language learners lies in students' tendency to identify tense as time while one should constantly bear in mind that 'time is not the same thing as tense. The importance of the distinction cannot be overestimated. Time is an element of our experience of reality. Tense is a purely grammatical idea' (Lewis, 1986:47). Consequently, present and past tenses should not be viewed as being solely related to present and past time. In order to comprehend the time framework that seems to function as a primary criterion in selecting and interpreting a tense, one should first provide a brief account of how time is perceived in relation to verb tenses and therefore argue that 'it would be possible and useful to distinguish real time from imaginary time (this would mean fiction and the future would use one form, while statements about the past and now would use another), we could distinguish finished and unfinished actions, it might be useful to distinguish unique events from repeated events and to state that in our normal understanding of time, the point Now naturally divides time into two: Before Now and After Now' (Lewis, 1986:48-49). It is thus essential to point out that the notion of time seems rather controversial and interrelated with the concept of contextual grammar since each individual seems to have a different perception of time: 'we need to ask whether we are talking about real, objective time, or what we might perhaps call psychological time. The distinction is of great importance. Objectively speaking, any event which happens takes a certain length of time. The length of time may be very short, but nothing happens instantaneously. On the other hand it is quite common for us to perceive things as if they happened instantaneously. From the point of view of the language we use, it is clearly the psychological time, the way we perceive the action, which is important, not what *objectively happened*' (Lewis, 1986:49). It is therefore essential for the researcher to remember-throughout any error classification process-that the use of tenses is not always restricted according to the rules of pedagogic grammar but is also

related to individual perception of the time framework within which an action occurred.

It is rather impossible to investigate the use and contextual applicability of English verb tenses without incorporating in our study the notion of aspect. Foreign language students tend to believe that tense and aspect should be viewed and evaluated as two separate entities but it seems crucial to present 'verb tenses and aspects as a cohesive system in a way that makes it accessible to different types of learners, and also to those with no explicit knowledge of grammar' (Svalberg, 1986:136). The notion of aspect in the English verb enables speakers and grammarians to 'interpret the temporal nature of the action-whether it is complete or incomplete, the time-orientation of an action, or the fact that the action concerned a finite period of time' (Lewis, 1986:51). Tense and aspect in the English verb are thus viewed as a coherent entity which enrich the form and meaning of the basic verb, expressed and presented by the present simple: 'the English verb tenses are produced by the interaction of the basic verb with any or all of three grammatical elements-the past, the perfect and the continuous. Each of these gives both a particular structure and a particular meaning to the verb. The tense generally known as the present simple is actually the basic verb in context with no grammatical meaning added by the speaker. When the speaker chooses to add grammatical meaning in the form of a tense there ought to be a reason for it. Knowing what grammatical meaning has been added should help you to understand the reason for using a particular tense in a particular situation' (Maule, 1991:151). The interaction of the basic verb with the past, the perfect and the continuous-as aspect-results to the production of the English verb tenses which are employed and manipulated by English language speakers in order to refer to actions related to a particular time framework.

Present Simple, as the tense of the basic verb, is commonly used to describe habits or things that are true, occur on a regular basis and will go on indefinitely (Hewings, 1999:2) and consequently states factual events which are not characterised by limited duration. One of the most frequent misapplications of the Present Simple occurs from foreign language students' misconception of the time framework to which the tense refers; the temporal interpretation of the particular tense is not related only to immediate present time but also to past and future time. The action of the verb in the Present Simple is viewed as timeless since it is more important how the speaker sees the event rather than its location in time (Maule, 1991:68). As far as Past Simple

use is concerned, we tend to see the event as distant in time but the time framework is not always clearly specified. If we consider the following examples[3] *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart lived from 1756 to 1791* and *I'd rather you spoke to him tonight* one could suspect a difference in the temporal realisation of the past. In the first example, Mozart did live from 1756 to1791, an action that took place in the past whereas in the second example the addressee of the utterance hasn't spoken to that person yet and the action did not take place in the past but will take place in the immediate future. It is therefore essential to point out that the Past Simple can refer either to real past time or to unreal non-past time (Maule, 1991:84).

The case of Present Perfect seems rather intriguing since it is frequently used to refer to actions that have a connection with the present time for the reason that the period of time to which the action refers has started in the past but continues until now (Murphy, 1994:16). Since the Present Perfect is used for events in the past which somehow relate to the moment of speaking, it refers to non-past time since we do not see the event as distant. It is therefore essential to point out that the grammatical element of the perfect is or can be used to refer to an event 'which has just happened, to an event in more distant past but the time of the event is not important and to an event which started in the past and is still in progress' (Maule, 1991:116). The Past Perfect, on the other hand, is an interesting combination of the grammatical elements of the past and the perfect and carries the distinct features of those elements; since the past refers to real past time and the perfect to an action that happened before another, the Past Perfect is commonly employed to talk about actions that occurred before a specific point in real past time. What makes Past Perfect similar to Past Simple in terms of use and applicability and thus misleading for English language learners, is the fact that both tenses tend to refer to real past time and unreal non-past time (Maule, 1991:91). If we examine the following examples[4] *Jo discovered that Leslie had lied to her* and *it would have been a great deal better if you'd been here,* it is evident that the first one is related to an event that took place in real past time whereas the second one refers to a time framework that is not necessarily past and expresses a wish that was not eventually realised. Consequently, it is of the utmost importance to

[3] The examples are from Raymond Murphy's Grammar (1994:10) and David Maules' *The Naked Verb* (1991:83) accordingly.
[4] The examples are from Martin Hewings' Grammar (1999:18) and David Maules' *The Naked Verb* (1991:90) accordingly.

make the distinction between the Past Simple that refers to actions in real past time and the Past Perfect that describes real events in before-past time (Maule, 1991:57).

The continuous aspect has a rather dramatically altering effect on both structure and meaning of the tenses since it tends to 'limit the duration of a longer-time verb (e.g. *She is/was living in a villa near Florence)*, stretch a shorter-time verb (e.g. *He was running away when I saw him)* or to provide repetition of an action if the verb will not stretch (e.g. *Eric was cutting himself with the bread knife/The lightening is flashing as Miguel reaches the front door)*' (Maule, 1991:81). It is important to note that any verb which is the product of the linguistic union of the continuous aspect with the present, past or perfect temporal description, retains the features of both tense and aspect; for instance a verb in the Past Perfect Continuous signifies that the action refers to either real past time or unreal non-past time and is either repeated or of limited duration. However, the way tenses merge with aspect in practical language use creates several ambiguities for English language learners since some tenses seem to share common temporal properties; for instance, the Present Continuous can refer to an action in either present or future time [5](e.g. *Please don't make so much noise. I'm working/I'm catching an early train to Grimble tomorrow)* but the Present Perfect Continuous can present-apart from its present reference-a future temporal indication[6] (e.g. *When you've been working here as long as I have you'll understand what it's all about).*

Grammar rules that are related to verb tenses' selection and applicability may be numerous and linguistically valid but should not be adopted blindly since it is the context that ultimately defines the appropriateness of a tense for a given situation. 'Rules depending on semantic information are distinguished by the fact that it is often impossible to decide on their applicability in a given sentence apart from considerations of meaning, context and knowledge of the world and the ways in which language is used. The selection of verb tenses, article usage and the determination of pronominal reference are examples or rules of this last type'(Petrovitz, 1997:202). Before actually investigating the context in which English verb tenses were produced by Greek native speakers, it is rather essential to investigate the use of Greek verb tenses that could originate negative transfer.

[5] The examples are from Raymond Murphy's Grammar (1994:2) and David Maule's *The Naked Verb* (1991:94) respectively.
[6] The example is from David Maule's *The Naked Verb* (1991:123).

2.3 The use of Greek verb tenses.

Greek is an Indo-European language and Standard Modern Greek seems to be the product and natural sequence of an older language created on the basis of nostalgia for the ancient Attic dialect: 'Greek scholars influenced by the ancient Greek language and inspired by romantic ideas wanted to introduce a literary language which would be as close to Attic Greek as possible. On the one hand, they tried to eliminate all foreign elements and to substitute Greek forms for them and on the other hand they forced the language into the old derivational and inflectional patterns. Because of its purifying tendencies it was called Katharevusa, meaning puristic.'(Warburton, 1970:1-2). Modern Greek (also known as Dimotiki) as the linguistic evolution of the language imposed by purists contains structures and forms of Katharevusa which have gradually been integrated in Modern Greek language. However, any attempt to investigate the use and practical application of Greek verb tenses should include a brief account of how aspect is perceived in Modern Greek and how its interaction with the tenses result to specific criteria for tense applicability.

The notion of aspect in the Greek language (just as in the English language) refers to the individual perception of the nature of a specific action: 'an action may be presented in its totality, as a single and complete event, as repeated habitually, as being in progress, or as completed in the past where its completion is relevant to the present state of things' (Holton et al., 1997:217). There are two types of aspect in Greek, the perfective aspect and the imperfective aspect. The first one is used to describe 'an action (less or so a state) which is viewed in its totality as a single and complete event. It is normally marked by a morphophonological modification of the stem itself' (Holton et al., 1997:220). The imperfective aspect is somehow more complicated not only in relation to its linguistic grammatical identity but also to the features it tends to attribute to tenses. Verbs of an imperfective aspect refer to actions or states that can be viewed either as 'single but continuous events (progressively) or as habitually repeated ones' (Holton et al., 1997:217). The linguistic interpretation of the imperfective aspect depends on the use of time or frequency adverbials that could render the action habitual, taking place at a specific point in time or of a rather continuous nature. However, it is the wider linguistic and pragmatic context that allows readers, speakers or interlocutors to clarify the role and influence of the

imperfective in the verb, presenting thus an action as either habitual or continuous (Holton et al., 1997:218). There are thus cases of imperfective use in which the speaker can be certain if an action is progressive or habitual but there are also numerous cases in which referential ambiguity is traced. Let us investigate the following examples[7]: *a) __ _____ _ _____;-What is Nick doing? b) _____- He is eating c) _____- He teaches or He is teaching d) _____ _____- He teaches linguistics.* It is quite evident that in example *b* the imperfective refers to a continuous action whereas in example *d* to a habitual one. Example *c* however creates some degree of ambiguity since it is possible that the speaker sees the action as either habitual or progressive. Ambiguity of this kind may be partly clarified through the investigation of the temporal reference attributed to verbs by tenses in Modern Greek.

As stated above, the Present tense in Modern Greek always has an imperfective aspect and it tends thus to interpret actions as both progressive and repetitive-habitual ones. The Present tense-just like the Present Continuous in English-can be used to refer to an action that will take place in the immediate future and also to an event that took place in the past (when it is employed to describe past events, it is usually referred to as historic present). However, one could trace a feature in the present tense's applicability that could be viewed as misleading when contrasted to the English language tense use: 'the present tense is also used in place where English would use the continuous perfect' (Holton et al., 1997:224). Apart from the Present tense, imperfective is also the aspect of the Imperfect tense (equivalent to the Past Continuous of the English language) and although the imperfective sees the action as either continuous or habitual, the Imperfect tense is rarely used as an entity but is usually complemented by another tense in the same sentence which is usually the Simple Past whose aspect is always perfective: 'L'imparfait établit une relation avec un autre terme. Et cet autre terme est représenté, effectivement ou virtuellement, par un autre verbe. C'est dire qu'un imparfait est jamais isolé ou que, s'il se trouvait isolé, on serait en présence d'un énoncé incomplet' (Seiler, 1952:113). Consequently, the Simple Past has a perfective aspect and describes an action or state that took place and was completed in the past. However, the Simple Past can also be used to refer to an action that started at some

[7] The examples are from Holton et al. *Greek: a comprehensive grammar of the modern language* (1997:218).

point in the past but carries on to the time of the utterance, an action which would be described in the English language by the Present Perfect (Holton et al., 1997:225).

The case of the Perfect tense (a rough equivalent of the Present Perfect in English) in Modern Greek is rather intriguing since it is both a tense and an aspect. 'It is an aspect because it describes an action or state as completed, and it is a tense because it places the action in time. More precisely, the perfect describes an action that is anterior to the time of the utterance but whose consequences are relevant to the present' (Holton et al., 1997:229). Even though the Greek Perfect tense shares the same temporal reference with the English Present Perfect tense, it is in many cases interchangeable with the Greek Simple Past tense not only when it refers to completed actions with current relevance but also to repeated actions from the past until now: 'it is sometimes argued that the opposition between the Aorist and the Perfect in Modern Greek has been neutralized so that most speakers do not make any difference between for example ____ *(I saw) and* ___ ___ *(I have seen)* but use the Aorist (Simple Past) in all positions' (Hedin, 1987:44). On the contrary, the Pluperfect (the equivalent of the English Past Perfect) which 'describes an action or state as having been completed in the past with consequences relevant to another, subsequent point in time, also in the past' (Holton et al., 1997:231) is very rarely replaced by the Simple Past only in the case where an action took place several times over a period of time [8]e.g. ____ ___/____ ___ _____ ___ π_____ _____ ___ _____- *I had seen/ I saw your brother many times in London (literal translation).* The investigation of the use and practical applicability of the verb tenses in Modern Greek as well as in the English language raises once again the core issue of this study: which are the tenses that are most likely to be transferred from the Greek L1 into the production of English L2?

2.4 Differences in use of L1 and L2 verb tenses that could originate negative transfer.

As many linguists and researchers have stated, negative transfer is likely to result 'in avoidance where a structure does not exist in the L1' (Benson, 2002:68). In the case of Modern Greek, the imperfective aspect of the Present tense does not distinguish between a habitual or progressive action and it is therefore difficult for the

[8] The example is from Holton et al. *Greek: a comprehensive grammar of the modern language* (1997:231).

interlocutor or the addressee to decide whether the equivalent Present Simple or Present Continuous is being used: 'the lack of a Greek present progressive causes mistakes e.g. *Where's Tom? He waters the flowers/ Look! Those two boys fight!'* (Swan&Smith, 1987:109). Moreover, the Perfect tense in Modern Greek is infrequently used-it is commonly replaced by Simple Past as stated above-and when it is used it refers to actions that have been completed: 'en le confrontant avec l'aoriste, nous disions que le parfait néo-grec est: 1. d'un emploi assez rare; 1. qu'il ne se trouve qu'en situation actualisée' (Seiler, 1952:148). Since the Perfect tense refers to a completed action while the Present tense to an action that is still in progress, Greek native speakers will tend to select the Present tense (Simple or Continuous) in English to express an action for which English native speakers would have chosen the Present Perfect Continuous [9]e.g. ____ _'____ __ _π___ ____ _____ ____*- I live/ I am living in this house for three years now (literal translation)- I have been living in this house for three years now (English).* In English, if a speaker wished to state that an action has been going on from the past up to a point near now, the appropriate tense would be the Present Perfect Continuous; Greek are likely to transfer in their English tense selection the one they usually employ in their native language for such a temporal description of an action: 'to say how long a present state has been going on, Greek may use a present tense e.g. ____ ____ _π_ ____ π__ _____ π____*- I know them since I was a kid (literal translation)- I have known them since I was a kid (English)'* (Swan&Smith, 1987:109).

In the production of Greeks' English verb tenses the Present Perfect is also likely to be replaced by the Past Simple since from the four uses of the English Perfect (perfect of result, experiential or existential perfect, perfect of persistent situation and perfect of recent news) apart from the third one-already mentioned above-the fourth one does not exist in Greek and is thus likely to be transferred e.g. ____ _ _____*!- The king came! (literal translation)- The king has come (English)* (Hedin, 1987:46). Apart from the Present Perfect, the Past Perfect and Past Perfect Continuous (Pluperfect) are also infrequent in Modern Greek and are very often replaced by Past Simple and Past Continuous accordingly: 'the present and past perfect are not much used in Greek; the past tense is commonly used instead'

[9] The example is from Holton et al., *Greek : a comprehensive grammar of the modern language* (1997:224).

(Swan&Smith, 1987:109). The examples[10] *I just finished reading that book when he telephoned me* and *I was living in that house for many years before I moved to Scotland* exhibit two distinct instances of negative transfer which are likely to occur in Greek learners' production of English verb tenses in which the Past Perfect and Past Perfect Continuous are replaced by Past Simple and Past Continuous accordingly. Furthermore, a clear distinction between the appropriateness of Past Simple or Past Continuous is difficult to be made in several instances by Greek learners since there are verbs in the Greek Imperfect which share the same form for both Past Simple and Past Continuous due to the Greek tense's imperfective aspect. This temporal dilemma and durational ambiguity could be transferred in the production of the English language e.g. _____ _____*- I was honest or I was being honest.*

Use of English Verb Tenses (L1)	**Greeks' use of English Verb Tenses (L2)**
Present Continuous	Present Simple
Present Simple	Present Continuous
Present Perfect Continuous	Present Simple/Present Continuous
Present Perfect	Present Simple/Past Simple
Past Perfect	Past Simple
Past Perfect Continuous	Past Continuous
Past Simple	Past Continuous
Past Continuous	Past Simple

(Table 1. Errors that could be attributed to negative transfer from Greek-L1 in the production of English-L2 verb tenses).

[10] The first example is from Swan&Smith *Learner English: a teacher's guide to interference and other problems* (1987:109).

The purpose of this chapter has been to identify the importance of grammar in relation to interference and what aspects of grammar constitute the focus of our study. It has also provided a detailed account of tense use in both English and Modern Greek and identified areas that are likely to originate negative transfer in relation to verb tenses' use in English[11]. The focus of this study is to investigate and consequently trace, classify and evaluate instances of negative transfer in the selection and production of English verb tenses as a result of L1 interference. However, before analysing any data depicting instances of negative transfer, it is essential to examine the methodology according to which data have been collected and errors have been classified. The aspects and overall criteria for negative transfer test design and implementation will be commented on the next chapter.

[11] These errors are summarised in Table 1.

CHAPTER THREE: INTERFERENCE TEST DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION.

3.1 Rationale for the design of the verb tenses interference test.

The process of tracing and classifying interference errors could be carried out in both spontaneous language use and guided, structured activities designed by the language teacher and researcher in order to prove the very existence of negative transfer errors. However, one aiming at collecting and evaluating instances of negative transfer should bear in mind that 'there is more evidence for transfer in *careful*, monitored style than in unmonitored, spontaneous speech' (Benson, 2002:69). Consequently, in order to collect samples of negative transfer instances in relation to verb tenses, I could not rely only to spontaneous language use or even written samples in which students would be asked to write their opinion or thesis on a topic since in this type of essay learners will not necessarily produce erroneous structures in relation to verb tenses and even if they do, the samples depicting instances of interference may not be adequate in order to support the hypothesis stated in my postgraduate thesis. Moreover, my attempt to trace and classify negative transfer errors in relation to contextual use of verb tenses from learners' essays produced in the classroom environment resulted to a collection of a hundred and thirteen essays in which only thirty-four interference errors were traced and from the total amount of negative transfer errors only seventeen reflected a misuse of verb tenses in a contextual framework. It was therefore essential to design and construct a more artificial interference measuring medium-as a supplementary data source-that would ensure the production of contextually erroneous English verb tenses in greater extent than the structures produced in spontaneous verb tenses use when the learners did not know they were being tested. Since time was not in my disposal, the collection and manifestation of interference samples had to be originated by a test which would be designed in terms of selecting and integrating production tasks that would elicit instances of negative transfer through carefully guided activities: 'in investigating language learning and use, one can attempt to obtain naturalistic samples from

learners as they interact in the target language. The problem with such a procedure is that it can be extremely time-consuming and difficult. In addition, it may not result in the outcomes one desires. The learners may simply not use the language items which the researchers are interested in. Focused investigations (that is, investigations in which the researchers have an idea of the linguistic features they are looking for) attempt to overcome these problems by employing elicitation to obtain samples of learner language for linguistic analysis' (Nunan, 1992:136-137). It is thus essential to provide a brief account of the production-elicitation tasks integrated in the interference test as well as its implementation parameters.

3.2 Criteria for test design and implementation.

In order to achieve learners' production of contextually erroneous verb tenses due to negative transfer, one should bear in mind while designing a test that it is rather beneficial for both researchers and learners to incorporate as many different elicitation tasks as possible. It is important for language teachers and researchers to be able to investigate how learners respond to various types of tasks since each learner's performance may vary according to the task. Thus, this negative transfer test had to be addressed to various people and consequently to various types of learners and I had to ensure that the test would not be biased in relation to any sort of learner or activity: 'it is important to realise that the method used for testing a language ability may itself affect the student's score. This is called *the method effect*, and its influence should be reduced as much as possible…in general, the more different methods a test employs, the more confidence we can have that the test is not biased towards one particular method or to one particular sort of learner' (Alderson et al., 1995:44-45). Consequently, I decided to employ two major types of elicitation tasks, the first one including guided and controlled activities that would challenge learners' performance in relation to verb tenses interference and the second one reflecting a rather indirect medium of testing negative transfer and involving a more spontaneous use of language through the implementation of an essay regarding events from a point in the past until now. In order to ensure that learners will employ as many verb tenses as possible, I resorted to an essay topic that is in fact a narrative of both past and recent events. Since spontaneous language use may not produce erroneous target language

structures, which are the focus of our study, I decided to integrate the first category of artificial-in the sense that they have been designed for the purpose of this test-activities that involve the production of English verb tenses and facilitate the researcher's attempt to trace, classify and evaluate instances of negative transfer.

One of the reasons that negative transfer errors occur is the fact that English language learners tend to use patterns of their mother tongue in the target language and this hypothesis is frequently manifested through the speakers' use of literal translation (Odlin, 1989:37). The first exercise requires a translation of a number of sentences from Greek to English and it was designed and integrated for the reason that it is vitally important for the researcher to investigate learners' tendency and likelihood to produce interference errors in a task of literal or near-literal translation. Since the key hypothesis of this study is that negative transfer errors occur due to the fact that several English verb tenses either do not exist or are rather inactive in Modern Greek, it is intriguing to examine learners' attitude and performance in a task where translation is involved.

Our attempt to establish a valid interference test is reflected on the selected activities that include structures that are likely to be transferred and constitute the main focus of this study. The fundamental purpose of the test was to investigate negative transfer in learners' written performance of English verb tenses and since no other irrelevant task or structure was integrated, one could argue in favour of the test's content validity: 'a test is said to have content validity if its content constitutes a representative sample of the language skills, structures, etc. with which it is meant to be concerned…the test would have content validity only if it included a proper sample of the relevant structures. Just what are the relevant structures will depend, of course, upon the purpose of the test' (Hughes, 1989:26). However, since the test would not be scored, one could not be certain about its reliability (Hughes, 1989:36); it is essential though to point out that this type of test does not measure linguistic knowledge but attempts to identify a notion traced in learners' performance as a result of the activation of cognitive and psychological mechanisms. Even if this test was to be re-distributed to the same target group, one should not feel confident to predict that the same amount of erroneous structures would occur and it is for that reason that this test can not be marked and scored since the hypothesis of this study is being manifested in instances of interference and not in acknowledged and regularly repeated errors. However, one plausible solution for attributing a certain degree of reliability to the

specific test was to integrate activities which have been already tested and with which learners feel quite familiar (Hughes, 1989:47). I selected three types of exercises (gap-filling, error identification and sentence transformation) from past papers[12] of the Cambridge First Certificate Examinations that were carried out in Greece in the last seven years[13]. The exercises from the F.C.E past papers that were integrated in the test include only the verb tenses that constitute the focus of this study and the interference test is thus made up of six different types of tasks (translation, gap-filling, error identification, sentence transformation and essay writing) that refer to various different skills and learner types but all aim at the production of contextually erroneous English verb tenses as a result of Greek-L1 interference. The time allocated for the completion of the test was two hours which was viewed as adequate considering the length of the test and the amount of structures that learners were asked to produce.

The target group to which the test was being addressed is of an intermediate or upper-intermediate level and the criteria for its identification are related to a secondary hypothesis implied in this study; it has been argued by various researchers that language transfer usually occurs in the first years and stages of second language acquisition but the secondary aim of this study is to demonstrate that interference could also be traced in the writings of people who have been practising the English language for years and are definitely not in the early stages of its acquisition: 'language transfer is usually considered to decline with proficiency though some researchers disagree, saying that it just manifests itself differently at higher levels' (Benson, 2002:69). The hypothesis that interference could be traced at higher levels but in a different form is expressed by the hypothesis stated in this thesis, that negative transfer in relation to verb tenses may be traced at early stages of English language acquisition in terms of morphology but it could also be traced at higher levels in terms of contextual misuse of English verb tenses. Thus, the target group to which the test was distributed comprised of English language learners (in the sense that they were not native speakers and that technically they could still be in the process of learning) that were not in their first stages of second language acquisition but have been practicing the English language for several years. The negative transfer

[12] The source of the F.C.E past papers that were designed for the examinations in Greece was the book by Andrew Betsis (1996). *Cambridge First Certificate Past Papers.* Piraeus: Andrew Betsis ELT.

test was distributed to twenty-five people, fourteen postgraduate students in Greece and eleven postgraduate students in the University of Edinburgh, all of them Greek native speakers. The postgraduate students who took the test were all of the same age (twenty-five years old) and had the same amount of years of personal instruction of the English language (eight years) but their academic background is characterised by a wide range of fields (law, linguistics, computer science, engineering, psychology, medicine, accounting). The test was distributed to the postgraduate students in Greece via email as it was the easiest and less time-consuming way for all people to access the tests and for me to collect them. Once all twenty-five tests were collected, it was vitally important to decide on the classification system of interference errors traced in the learners' written production of English verb tenses.

3.3 Error classification system.

It was of the utmost importance to establish a classification system in order to record and evaluate the contextually erroneous use of English verb tenses in learners' written production. The main concept of error classification was originated by Odlin (1989:36-38) who established three major negative transfer errors categories in relation to the errors' form and function in an utterance: underproduction, overproduction and production errors. Underproduction is identified as a category which included negative transfer errors resulting from learners' avoidance of frequent target language structures especially when students have not mastered these structures or do not feel confident using them. Overproduction is usually identified as 'a consequence of underproduction' (Odlin, 1989:37) for the reason that students tend to produce too many simple sentences-a production that an English native speaker would not have carried out-in order to avoid confusing or complex target language structures. Furthermore, the production errors category is attributed four subcategories: substitutions, calques, alterations of structures and hypercorrections. Substitutions refer to the use of a native language structure in the production of the target language, calques are identified as the use of structures which reflect native language structures and are very often the result of literal translation, alterations of

[13] The past papers are from 1996 to 2002 and the 2003 paper was not included since a new book was being printed at the time the test was designed.

structures refer to students' production of target language structures that have been somehow altered in order to reflect mother tongue structures and hypercorrections are identified as learners' corrections of L2 structures that were not in fact erroneous but have been altered under the influence of the equivalent L1 forms.

Underproduction	Avoidance of L2 verb tenses
Overproduction	Excessive use of certain L2 verb tenses in order to avoid other tenses
Substitutions	Verb tenses produced in L1
Calques	Use of L2 verb tenses reflecting L1 verb tenses use
Alterations of structures	L2 verb tenses structures altered so as to reflect L1 structures
Hypercorrections	Correction of non-erroneous L2 verb tenses in order to reflect L1 tenses
Errors that may or may not be attributed to interference	1. Tense use that may/may not be attributed to interference 2. Interference errors that are not the focus of this study
Errors not attributed to interference	Errors irrelevant to the notion of interference

(Table2. Error Classification system applied to the interference test).

The classification system of negative transfer errors established by Terence Odlin (1989:36-38) has been adopted, slightly expanded and thus modified for the purpose of this study[14]. Throughout the classification process of the contextually erroneous use of English verb tenses-according to the results and findings of the interference test- underproduction was viewed as learners' avoidance of English verb tenses that either do not exist or are inactive in Modern Greek. Overproduction was regarded as the excessive use of L2 structures or verb tenses according to which students tend to avoid certain English verb tenses by selecting and employing tenses that are either contextually inappropriate or do not meet the criteria of target language production in relation to the linguistic demands of a particular task of the interference test. Substitutions refer to the use of verb tenses in Greek instead of English whereas

[14] Summarised in Table 2.

calques to the use of verb tenses that could be viewed as rather inappropriate for the English context but applicable to the Greek one. The category of alterations of structures comprises verb tenses structures that have been somehow altered in order to reflect verb tenses structures of the mother tongue whereas the category of hypercorrections includes English verb tenses that were originally applied and contextually applicable but were changed so as to meet the context suitability criteria of the native language. Two more categories have been added to the above classification system, that of verb tenses errors that can not be attributed to negative transfer and that of verb tenses errors that may or may not be attributed to interference. This last classification category includes verb tenses errors of which one can not be certain whether they are attributed to interference or not as well as verb tenses errors which can be attributed to interference but are not the specific verb tenses (see Table 1) that constitute the main focus of this study.

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a brief account of the reasons and criteria for the design and implementation of the interference test as well as to account for the target group to which the negative transfer test was being addressed. A rationale for the design, selection and integration of the activities has also been stated and the parameters of the error classification system –which has been applied-have been thoroughly analysed. The data collected from the twenty-five interference tests will be analysed and commented on the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: INTERFERENCE DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Distribution of interference errors in samples of free writing and in the interference tests.

The analysis of the interference data from the tests disclosed various instances of contextually inappropriate verb tense use, attributed to negative transfer, as well as other erroneous instances, some of them being potentially attributed to interference and some others viewed as irrelevant to the notion of negative transfer[15]. The interference findings also include errors related to lexicon and various grammatical structures and the non-interference errors are related not only to verb tense use but also to spelling, lexicon and various grammatical structures mostly related to verb morphology and word order. The category of potential interference included erroneous instances in relation to verb tense use, grammatical structures and lexicon. Since the object of our study refers to inappropriate contextual application of English verb tenses, all the erroneous instances attributed to interference but related to grammatical structures and lexicon were not employed or investigated for the purposes of this study. Moreover, erroneous verb tense instances that had been classified as potential interference were also not investigated and will therefore not be analysed since the main focus of this project is the case of distinct and easily discernable negative transfer errors. Consequently, the case of rather ambiguous interference errors was not of any practical interest to the researcher. On the contrary, the amount of interference errors traced in samples of free writing as well as in the interference tests is likely to initiate a discussion concerning the transferability of verb tense use in relation to context in both free writing and guided, artificial interference testing.

The classification of interference errors in both free writing and interference test was carried out in terms of whether English verb tense use produces a contextually erroneous utterance: ‘however, a sentence may still be erroneous and

[15] Non-interference errors related to any aspect of language are not the object of our study and were thus not taken into consideration and further analysis.

show no outward and formal signs of this. It may be perfectly well-formed and yet be erroneous in the context. Purely superficial formal correctness is no guarantee of absence of error…it is the context which enables us, mostly quite subconsciously, to place the intended interpretation on such ambiguous sentences' (Corder, 1981:39).

Contextually erroneous production of English verb tense use is reflected in this study in the investigation of calques, hypercorrections and alterations of structures since in these cases the learner produces samples of the target language whereas in the case of underproduction, transfer is attributed to avoidance: 'as a production process, transfer is involved in the learner's retrieval of this knowledge and in his efforts to bridge linguistically those gaps in his knowledge which cannot be side-stepped by avoidance' (Kellerman &Smith, 1986:22). In the samples of free writing, instances of hypercorrection, underproduction or alteration of structures have not been traced and therefore the categories were formed as potential interference, calques and lexicon[16] (a category including instances of interference errors in relation to lexical items). The interference data recording and analysis-in relation to samples of free writing[17]-disclosed that only twenty-one out of a hundred interference errors could be attributed to potential interference. Interference errors in relation to lexical items were estimated to twenty-nine per cent whereas half (fifty per cent) of the overall distribution of negative transfer errors refer to the use of calques in free writing.

The fact that out of a hundred errors, fifty were attributed to interference in English verb tense use and to calques in particular demonstrates that the notion of negative transfer in relation to contextual English verb tense use should not be ignored or underestimated. Since the occurrence of calques in samples of free writing is estimated as fifty per cent of the overall amount of errors-including those of potential interference-one should feel inclined to assume that Greek learners have a substantial amount of difficulty in using the contextually appropriate verb tense in English for the reason that they select and employ the tense that would have been contextually appropriate for the same instance in the Greek language. Thus, apart from the contextually erroneous instances related to verb tenses, the fact that the researcher traced errors that were not related to verb tense use (lexicon) but were

[16] Non-interference errors were noted only in the interference tests since this test had been designed and implemented in order to assess negative transfer and it was viewed as essential to also record erroneous instances not attributed to interference.

attributed to negative transfer, elaborates and justifies the assumption that the native language could have a significant impact on the acquisition and performance of the L2 learner.

The findings of the interference tests were classified in three major categories all related to contextual use of English verb tenses: interference errors, potential interference errors and non-interference errors[18]. Although the researcher had anticipated to trace instances of overproduction and substitution, the interference test data showed no evidence of the occurrence of such erroneous production. Since all these errors were traced and recorded from the learners' L2 production in the interference tests, there was a specific context in all the activities of the test that made errors apparent to the researcher and thus facilitated their classification: 'any discussion of error and any attempt at error analysis must, then, take account of the breadth of context which is adopted as criterial for whether error has occurred. I shall call this variation in criterial contextual focus *error domain,* which may be defined as the rank of the linguistic unit which must be taken as context in order for the error to become apparent' (Lennon, 1991:191). Thus, the error domain in relation to the specific interference test is not only the use of verb tenses-which refer to 'temporal deixis, the relation of a given situation to a reference time, usually the time of speech' (Robison, 1995:345)-but also the viewpoint aspect which implies that 'the temporal characteristics of a situation are viewed as dependent of its relation to any reference time' (Robison, 1995:345).

Consequently, out of a hundred erroneous instances in relation to contextually inappropriate verb tense use, sixty-nine errors were attributed to interference, thirteen to potential interference and eighteen to non-interference. As one may notice, the amount of potential interference errors in the interference tests (thirteen per cent) is smaller than the one in the samples of free writing (twenty-one per cent). However, this gap between the two percentages may be attributed to the fact that the test had been constructed in such a way so as learners would produce more erroneous instances due to negative transfer and it is thus natural that the cases of ambiguous interference production should be more in the tests than in free writing. Moreover, it is essential to point out that the amount of non-interference errors was relatively small

[17] The distribution of interference errors in samples of free writing is presented in Chart 1.
[18] The distribution of errors in the interference tests is presented in Chart 3.

(only eighteen per cent) which demonstrates that the constructed test served its purpose.

The majority of errors traced in the interference tests were therefore attributed to negative transfer and from the overall amount of interference errors, the vast majority (seventy-four per cent) were identified as being calques[19]. The rest of the interference error categories include relatively small amounts of errors: out of a hundred interference errors twenty-three were attributed to underproduction, only two to hypercorrections and only one to alterations of structures.

One may have expected that the analysis of the interference findings would have disclosed a more equal distribution among the negative transfer subcategories (calques, underproduction, alterations of structures and hypercorrections) or at least that there would not be such a great distance between calques and the other three categories. The statistical analysis however demonstrates that calques constitute the fundamental interference error category in terms of occurrence and frequency. It is also essential to point out that there is a greater occurrence of calques in the interference tests than in the samples of free writing and this statistical implication seems to confirm the suggestion that learners tend to produce more instances of negative transfer in guided activities than in spontaneous language use (Benson, 2002:69). However, calques-as it appears from the test findings and the samples of free writing-constitute the dominant type of interference error in English verb tense use and it is thus essential to investigate their occurrence and distribution in both artificial test activities and spontaneous L2 use in writing.

4.2 Distribution of calques in samples of free writing and in the interference tests.

The variety and distribution of structures in relation to English verb tense use in the category of calques seems to reinforce the idea that 'the use of native language information in the formation and structure of interlanguage is a selection process i.e. there are some native language structures and processes more likely to be transferred than others' (Selinker, 1992:207). Consequently, calques in samples of free writing

[19] The distribution of interference errors in the interference tests is presented in Chart 4.

and in the interference tests[20] do not involve the same verb tenses and even those who are common to both are not discerned in the same degree in terms of frequency and occurrence. For instance, the case of Present Simple use instead of Present Perfect and that of Past Simple instead of Present Perfect were not recorded in the samples of free writing. A plausible rationale for these structures' absence is that the test was designed in such a way as to incorporate the specific structures which were not viewed as applicable or indispensable in the case of learners' free writing. The topic of the free writing may have been such that the temporal identity and function of the Present Perfect was not actually required.

Furthermore, it is rather interesting that in samples of free writing, the use of Past Simple instead of Past Continuous is the second most dominant calque (twenty-three per cent) whereas in the interference tests only two per cent of the overall amount of calques involved the use of the specific structure. Accordingly, the use of Past Continuous instead of Past Simple in the free writing samples is estimated as the third most dominant calque (eighteen per cent) whereas in the case of the negative transfer tests, out of a hundred calques only six involved the specific structure use. This statistical variation between certain calques in free writing and in the interference tests could be partially attributed to the context of each type of L2 production. There is a high probability that the context or topic of the free writing involved a greater and more expanded use of the above structures than the interference test but it is also possible that these particular structures do not constitute a significant source of interference (as their percentages in the interference tests are not particularly high) for the reason that they do not cause particular problems for the learners despite the researcher's original anticipations.

The findings in both spontaneous and guided L2 production demonstrate that the first most frequent and dominant calque refers to the use of Past Simple instead of Past Perfect. The fact that this particular calque is the most frequently occurring in both types of L2 production seems to reinforce the idea that this structure is highly problematic for Greek learners in their production of the English language whether their performance is spontaneous or controlled. However, the specific calque was estimated as occurring in greater extent in the interference tests (out of a hundred calques thirty-five involve the use the above tenses) than in free writing (twenty-nine

[20] The distribution of calques in samples of free writing and in the interference tests is presented in

in a total of a hundred calques). There is thus not a great difference in the two figures since there are six more calques in the interference tests especially if one bears in mind that the test included more interference assessing activities, including that of free writing. The fact that the two percentages are somehow close seems to reinforce the problematic character and overall transferability of the particular structure (P.Perfect vs. P.Simple) in Greek learners' production of English verb tenses.

Moreover, the second most frequently occurring calque in the negative transfer test-which is characterised by a noticeable statistical distance from the first one-is that of Present Simple use instead of Present Perfect Continuous (sixteen per cent). The third most frequent calque, that of Past Simple use instead of Present Perfect, is estimated to twelve per cent whereas the fourth most frequent calque, that of Present Simple use instead of Present Perfect, refers to ten erroneous instances out of a total of a hundred calques. It is extremely interesting that there is no great statistical difference in the occurrence and frequency of the second, third and fourth most dominant calques and one may therefore assume that all these structures could not be placed in any absolute hierarchy of importance or occurrence. Researchers, linguists and English language teachers should be attentive to the presence of these structures in English verb tense use since they could be viewed and valued as equally important or likely to occur. It is also striking to the researcher that in samples of spontaneous production-apart from the first three most dominant calques in terms of occurrence-all the other calques were estimated to be equally distributed and consequently presented as equally frequent whereas in the interference tests there is not equal distribution of calques providing thus a different likelihood of occurrence for each structure.

Moreover, in the case of the negative transfer tests the smallest percentage (two calques out of a total of one hundred) is attributed to the use of Present Simple in the place of Present Continuous and to the use of Present Continuous instead of Present Simple. As opposed to the researcher's anticipations, these two calques are estimated as being the least problematic and frequent in the L2 production of Greek learners than the other calques. However, it is rather essential to point out that regardless of the analysis of the distribution of calques in spontaneous and guided L2 written production, all anticipated and transferable verb tenses were traced and

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Chart 2 and Chart 10 respectively.

recorded in the interference tests establishing thus the hypothesis that Greek learners tend to produce contextually erroneous English verb tenses as a result of negative transfer. It is therefore important to investigate the amount of erroneous instances of Greek learners who live and study in Greece as opposed to those of learners who are currently living and studying in Edinburgh attempting thus to examine more aspects and implications of the notion of L1 interference.

4.3 Distribution of interference errors of students in Greece and Scotland.

Researchers and scholars have suggested that the occurrence of transfer could be originated by the aerial contact between the native language and the target language (Odlin, 1989:9). However, even if this assumption is valid it should under no circumstances be considered an axiom since regional contact is not always a predisposition for the occurrence of the notion of interference. From the interference data analysed so far, one can assume that Greek learners tend to produce contextually inappropriate English verb tenses due to negative transfer even though Modern Greek is in no aerial contact with the English language. It would thus be extremely intriguing to investigate learners' amount of interference errors in relation to the country in which they live and consequently attempt to examine if living in an English speaking environment has any kind of diminishing effect in the amount of transfer or if Greek native speakers who live abroad tend to transfer structures from their L1 but on a different level.

The distribution of interference errors based on the country of learners' studies and current living[21] has disclosed that out of a hundred interference errors Greek learners who live in Greece have made sixty-one whereas Greek learners who live in Scotland thirty-nine. The statistical difference between the two percentages demonstrates that Greek learners who do not live in an English speaking environment and are therefore in no immediate contact with the English language tend to transfer more verb tense structures in their L2 production. On the other hand, students who are currently living in Scotland have produced a smaller amount of interference errors (thirty-nine per cent) but their L2 production is not transfer-free. One could not be

certain of the amount of interference errors of the learners who live in Scotland if they had lived abroad for more years. However, it is rather preferable not to hypothesize on any aspect of transfer in L2 production but to examine in more detail the production of each group of students in relation to each category of interference errors.

Any thorough analysis of the distribution of calques produced by students who live in Greece and Scotland [22] would demonstrate that more calques were produced by students living in a Greek speaking environment than by those who are currently in an English speaking environment. The recording of calques in the interference tests has shown that out of a hundred calques fifty-eight were produced by students in Greece and forty-two by learners in Edinburgh. The gap between the two percentages implies that learners of the first category are more likely to produce calques. Before stating any assumptions on the role of the L2 environment in the occurrence of negative transfer, one should bear in mind that the statistical distance between the two categories of learners is not great (learners in Greece made sixteen more errors than the ones in Scotland) and researchers should therefore not feel particularly confident stating that learners who live in an English speaking environment are less likely to produce erroneous utterances due to negative transfer than others who live in a native language environment.

However, the analysis of the distribution of underproduction errors[23] states that out of a total of one hundred underproduction errors students in Greece produced seventy-four whereas learners in Scotland twenty-six. It is therefore evident that the first category is more likely to resort to underproduction than the second one and in this case the role of the place of studies may actually be more active and influential: 'none of us possesses a complete and perfect knowledge of a language. There are many situations which we avoid because we feel we are not equipped to cope linguistically with them' (Corder, 1981:46). A plausible interpretation of the underproduction interference findings could refer to the lack of confidence of people living in a native language speaking environment in employing L2 structures with which they have not been familiar or of which they feel rather uncertain. There is a high probability that Greek native speakers who have been living and studying in Scotland feel more confident in using target language structures since they are

[21] The distribution of interference errors based on the country of studies is presented in Chart 5.
[22] The distribution of calques according to the place of studies is presented in Chart 6.
[23] The distribution of underproduction errors according to the place of studies is presented in Chart 7.

communicating in the L2 on a more frequent basis. It is only natural that people who live and communicate in an English speaking country should feel more inclined to cope with L2 structures and not at all intimidated by them.

The fact that learners who live in Scotland are less likely to resort to underproduction than those who live in a mother tongue environment does not imply that Scotland students will not produce erroneous instances due to negative transfer. Our attempt to analyse the distribution of hypercorrections in relation to both groups of students has demonstrated that [24]Greek native speakers in Scotland tend to produce a greater amount of hypercorrections than those who live in Greece. Our investigation of the hypercorrections findings shows that out of a total of one hundred hypercorrections learners in Scotland produced fifty-five whereas learners in Greece forty-five. Apart from hypercorrections, learners in Scotland are also more likely to alter L2 verb tenses structures in order to reflect L1 structures than students in Greece. The distribution of alterations of structures [25]clearly shows that out of a hundred of alterations of structures learners in Scotland have produced eighty-three whereas learners from Greece only seventeen. There is thus a considerable distance between the two percentages and if the distribution of hypercorrections is also taken into account, one could easily assume that the occurrence of negative transfer is not affected or diminished by an English speaking environment. It could be thus accurate to state that people who have established a daily or regular contact with the L2 produce contextually erroneous verb tense utterances due to interference but on a different level since their negative transfer production is reflected in structures or types of interference errors which are less frequent or likely to occur (see Chart 4).

4.4 Distribution of interference errors in relation to the type of activity.

A thorough investigation of the distribution of negative transfer errors in relation to the types of activities in the interference test is rather essential since learners may not produce equal amounts of interference errors in all three types of activities. The interference test comprised of three major types of activities: a

[24] The distribution of hypercorrections according to the place of studies is presented in Chart 8.
[25] The distribution of alterations of structures according to the place of studies is presented in Chart 9.

translation activity including ten sentences, a writing essay with a specific topic and a section of F.C.E activities which included three gap-filling tasks, an error recognition task and a sentence transformation exercise. Consequently, the interference test activities were divided into three major categories: translation, F.C.E activities and free writing.

The translation activity was designed and included in the test in order to assess how learners would express a temporal context from their native language in the target language and did not aim at a mere literal translation but at indicating that Greek native speakers are not aware of the differences between the contextual verb tense use of the L1 and the L2: 'it should be made clear that the distinction between *interference* and *translation* from the first language as causes of student error is a fine one. The implication of the term *interference* is that what takes place is largely unconscious in the mind of the learner' (Norrish, 1983:26). The translation activity was therefore not designed to produce literal translation but contextually erroneous verb tense use due to negative transfer and the free writing activity was guided only in the sense that a particular topic had been selected which involved the use of all anticipated transferable verb tense structures. As far as the F.C.E activities are concerned, the researcher has not designed or modified them in any way in order to prove or validate the verb tenses interference hypothesis stated in this study. These activities have just been selected from passed F.C.E papers in terms of likelihood to produce various instances of contextually transferred verb tenses in English.

The analysis of the distribution of the interference errors in the three types of activities[26] has demonstrated that out of a hundred interference errors marked in the test twenty-seven have been recorded in the translation activity, only three in the free writing activity and seventy in the F.C.E activities. The assumption that learners are more likely to produce negative transfer errors in guided activities that in free writing and spontaneous use of the L2 has been stated by various researchers and scholars (Benson, 2002:69) but the fact that in this particular test more interference errors were produced in the F.C.E activities than in the translation activity seems somehow opposed to the suggestions of various linguists and researchers: 'there seems to be general agreement that there is more transfer in translations than in other types of test; while multiple choice and cloze tests produce fewer contrastive errors' (Nickel in

[26] The distribution of interference errors in the three types of activities is presented in Chart 11.

Lott, 1983:258). On the contrary, in the case of the specific interference test, the vast majority of the contrastive, negative transfer errors were produced in cloze tests, sentence transformation and error recognition exercises which form in fact the F.C.E type of activity. It is rather striking that the greatest amount-which is characterised by a substantial statistical distance from the other two categories- of interference errors was produced in the only type of activity that had not been designed in order to elicit negative transfer errors. The fact that Greek native speakers produced the greatest amount of interference errors in the only type of activity which not only had not been especially designed for the purpose of the test but has also been a popular medium of assessing language proficiency by a worldwide known and acknowledged institution seems to reinforce and validate the hypothesis that Greek learners tend to transfer the contextual use of L1 verb tenses in the production of the target language. It is also essential to point out that the percentage of interference errors in the F.C.E activities included in the test could partially account for the respectively high percentage of Greek learners' failure in the Cambridge First Certificate Examinations.

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a detailed analysis of the distribution of interference errors in both interference tests and samples of free writing and to investigate the distribution of verb tenses structures that are likely to be transferred in the production of the English language. It has also focused on the performance of students in relation to their place of studies and examined the contribution and function of each type of activity in learners' contextually erroneous production due to negative transfer. In the following chapter, we will attempt an evaluation of the interference test and its findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE VERB TENSE INTERFERENCE HYPOTHESIS REVISITED.

5.1 Evaluation of the interference test.

The specific test was designed and implemented in order to elicit contextually erroneous instances of verb tense use due to interference and since all the aspects referring to its design such as the reasons for constructing it, the selected activities, the target group and the error classification system have been already elaborated (see Chapter 3) it is would be useful to investigate and consequently evaluate several aspects of its implementation related to the test's reliability.

In order to ensure the notion of reliability for any given test 'what we have to do is construct, administer and score tests in such a way that the scores actually obtained on a test on a particular occasion are likely to be very similar to those which would have been obtained if it had been administered to the same students with the same ability, but at a different time' (Hughes, 1989:36). The particular test was not marked and given a score since it didn't aim at assessing language proficiency but at depicting instances of negative transfer in order to validate the verb tense interference hypothesis stated in this study. Consequently, the test's reliability can not be verified in terms of attaining the same or similar scores but only in relation to the recording and classification of the same or similar interference findings if the test was to be redistributed after a period of time.

Asserting thus reliability in such a way would be a practically unattainable goal for the specific test since the nature of interlanguage 'is *dynamic* (not stable) because its attributes change with time. It is *non-recursive* because it involves feedback processes. It is *stochastic* because at least some of its processes follow probability distributions. It is *non-stationary* because some of the probability distributions are dependent on the variable time. It is *open* because it depends on external i.e. environmental variables such as linguistic input. Finally, it is *goal-seeking* because it tends to develop towards a characteristic final state' (Grotjahn, 1983:235). The dynamic nature of the interlanguage system implies that the learners' hypotheses concerning language use change, evolve or differentiate over time and if

the test was to be redistributed in some point in the future, the researcher may record different interference findings in terms of type and quantity of structures. The non-stationary character of interlanguage is therefore attributed to the altering effect of time in the distributions of interference instances. Moreover, the interference test findings may be completely different in amount, nature and distribution since the same subjects may have received-by the time of the test's redistribution-a greater amount of linguistic input and feedback which could enable them to ameliorate their L2 performance in terms of diminishing the negative transfer effect.

Another fundamental aspect that needs to be examined when investigating the reliability of the interference test is that of scoring or error recording viewpoint: 'an error may be considered less serious when it occurs in free composition than when it occurs in some more structured activity where the learner has received guidance which should have helped him or her to avoid making it' (Davies, 1983:310). In the case of the specific interference test, the purpose of establishing and employing an error classification system was to ensure that no error would be considered more or less significant and that all interference errors would be recorded and classified. However, the researcher's judgement as to whether an error can be actually attributed to interference or not could be affected by his knowledge of the testees' standard performance: 'the teacher's knowledge of the particular learner who made an error may also sometimes affect his or her view of its gravity; it may, for instance, help him/her to decide whether an error is the result of a rare lapse of concentration, a slip of the tongue or pen or reflects a real failure to grasp some rule' (Davies, 1983:310). The researcher's knowledge of the testees and their standard performance facilitated the interference errors recording and classification process and I was thus able to distinguish between their slips of the pen (which were classified as errors that were not attributed to negative transfer) and contextually erroneous instances of verb tense use in English (which were classified as interference errors).

However, there is another parameter in interference errors recording and classification which is related to the marking procedure itself. Since the negative transfer errors have been traced and classified by only one researcher who is not a native speaker, it is possible that the recording of the interference errors and consequently their final distribution might have been different if a native speaker was selected to implement the recording and statistical analysis of the interference tests: 'native speakers were found to mark more leniently than non-native teachers, this

being attributable, apparently, to the native speakers' better knowledge of the language, particularly of the wide variety of acceptable structures' (Hughes&Lascaratou, 1982:180). It is therefore possible that if a native speaker had marked and classified the interference errors, the overall distribution would have been different since some findings might not have been viewed as clear-cut instances of interference according to his own viewpoint. The fact that the overall error distribution might have been different due to native speaker's marking does not imply that the distribution of errors presented and analysed in this thesis is not valid. Even though interference errors have been recorded, classified and estimated by a non-native teacher, the procedure of error analysis was characterised by the researcher's individual viewpoint and by consistency in applying the criteria for defining and classifying interference errors (as presented in Chapter 3). However, an English native speaker might not have been adequately exposed to Greek-L1 verb tense structures and therefore not have been able to identify the equivalent L1 structures and the occurrence of interference. Consequently, the ideal process of contrastive analysis would be that two researchers, an English native speaker and a Greek native speaker, are involved in the process of negative transfer errors recording and classification. My past view that a native speaker would not be required to assist throughout the interference data processing accounts for my decision to analyse the interference data on my own.

5.2 Evaluation of the test findings.

The occurrence of interference errors related to all the anticipated, transferable verb tense structures seems to validate the verb tense interference hypothesis stated in this study. However, it is essential to point out several aspects of L1 interference as they occur from the data analysis of this study. Various linguists and scholars have suggested that negative transfer occurs more frequently in early stages of L2 acquisition and is rather unlikely to be traced in the performance of learners who have a greater degree of target language familiarity: 'it should be noted that negative transfer (sometimes called *interference*) is more common in the early stages of L2 learning and typically decreases as the learner develops familiarity with the L2' (Yule, 1996:195). However, the findings of the interference test have disclosed that

negative transfer occurs even in the performance of learners who are not in their early stage of L2 acquisition. After all, all testees have had eight years of personal instruction of the English language, a number that implies that learners have or ought to have had a substantial degree of L2 familiarity. Consequently, the researcher's findings demonstrate that the amount of years of personal instruction or the degree of familiarity with the English language constitute two factors which seem irrelevant to the occurrence of negative transfer.

Another aspect related to the occurrence of interference, which has been stated by various linguists and challenged in this study, refers to the role of formal education as inhibiting interference: 'learners with considerable formal education manifest less cross-linguistic influence than those with little' (Ellis, 1997:127). According to the test findings, all interference errors were produced by people who are postgraduate students in both Greece and Scotland, with a wide range of academic fields of specialisation (law, medicine, linguistics, engineering, computer science, psychology, accounting). Even though the group from Greece has produced more contextually erroneous instances of verb tense use due to negative transfer, it is extremely important to point out that both groups of postgraduate students have produced interference errors in relation to L2 verb tense use. Thus the factor of formal education does not constitute an influential variable in the occurrence of the notion of interference since all testees have received a substantial amount of instruction and are currently on a postgraduate level.

The controversial nature and function of negative transfer in learners' L2 performance has also been the driving force of various debates among scholars in relation to the type of context in which it is more likely to occur. Data analysis of several studies has disclosed that 'negative transfer will be more evident in instructed than in naturalistic learning' (Ellis, 1997:126) whereas the counter-argument suggests that in an unfocused, naturalistic context the amount of interference errors will be greater than in guided, instructed activities: 'in unfocused contexts, the constraints on negative transfer may be weak, as there is generally less concern about heeding target language norms' (Odlin, 1989:147). In the case of the interference assessing medium, which has been designed for the purposes of this study, the results of the data analysis are in total accord with the first thesis which states that spontaneous speech is a context in which negative transfer errors are less likely to occur since the vast majority of the testees' errors were produced in the guided activities and not in the

section of the free writing. The fact that learners produced more contextually erroneous instances of L2 verb tense use in the structured activities of the interference test than in the free writing section could imply that students are less likely to fall back on their L1 when they are asked to demonstrate their L2 performance in a context that promotes and allows language creativity. Consequently, when students are obliged to perform in a rather linguistically confined context, there may be a greater probability for interference occurrence due to limitations in contextual selection and application of verb tenses in the target language.

CONCLUSION

The controversial nature of L1 interference in L2 acquisition and performance has proved to be a hindering factor in researchers' and linguists' willingness to investigate the reasons for the occurrence of negative transfer in target language performance as well as its repercussions in L2 communication. The behaviourist origin of interference established a misleading picture of the notion's character, allegedly viewing errors as unacceptable and attributed to old and potentially harmful habits. Recent research and linguistic evolution have demonstrated that transfer is not an axiomatically negative notion and have thus attributed interference a positive connotation and practical application. Positive transfer is finally viewed as promoting L2 acquisition whereas negative transfer is considered a *sine qua non* condition throughout the target language acquisition process which actually signifies that the learner uses his native language as a supplementary linguistic device in order to achieve effective L2 communication. Negative transfer is therefore a linguistic phenomenon that needs to be further investigated in terms of both psychological and cognitive occurrence.

The focus of this study has been on contextually erroneous instances of verb tense use in the performance of the English language due to negative transfer. One could enumerate various studies highlighting the occurrence of interference in L2 performance in relation to grammar or lexicon. However, it is rather striking that most studies have chosen to focus on morphological and semantic aspects of the English language and very few on the transferable structures with a potential pragmatic effect in L2 written or oral performance. It is therefore important for linguists to expand their cross-linguistic field of research towards the direction of contextual grammar since transferability has also been recorded in learners' criteria for selection and application of verb tenses. However, it is essential to point out that context is indispensable in any attempt to decide upon an L1 transferred structure or to record and classify interference instances.

Another focus of this study has been the transferability of Modern Greek verb tense structures to English due to contextual differences in selection and application of verb tenses between the two languages. The selection of Greek as the L1 was based not only on the fact that I am a Greek native speaker but also on observing for several

years that Greek learners tend to transfer structures and patterns from their mother tongue to the target language. This study seems to validate the verb tense interference hypothesis but throughout my research period I have discovered that the Greek language is probably the least researched one in the field of cross-linguistic influence. Even though Modern Greek is not widely spread or spoken it should still be further researched since one could hardly argue against its lexical and structural wealth or its being an extremely powerful and influential L1 as any L1 can be. It is my sincere wish and aspiration that this study could give rise to a further and more in-depth linguistic investigation of Modern Greek or contextual grammar in general in terms of cross-linguistic influence.

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Appendix 1

Verb Tense Interference Test

GUIDELINES:

This test is being addressed to English language learners of an intermediate level who are Greek native speakers. It has been designed and will be implemented as a source of data collection for my M.Ed. (Master of Education) TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) postgraduate thesis (dissertation), currently taking place in the University of Edinburgh. All testees are welcome to state-only if they wish to do so-their name, age, sex and number of years of personal instruction of the English language. It is essential to point out that all personal data will be treated as confidential. Please follow the instructions carefully and do not under any circumstances consult a dictionary in order to check your answers.

TIME ALLOCATED: 2 HOURS

GOOD LUCK!!!!!

EXERCISES:

A. Translate the following sentences in English.

1. _____ _π___ ___ ____ ___, _____ ___ _ _____ _π_____ ___ ____ ___ π__ ___ ___ _____ ____ _____.

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2. _ _____ _____ ___ _____ _π_ ____ π__ _π_____ ___ _____ ___ __’____ __ ____ _π_____ _____ _π_ _____ _____π___.

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3. ____ ____ ____ _____ _ _____ ___ π__ ___ ____ _____ __ _____ _____ _____. ____ _____ ____ _____, _____ ____ _____ _π__ _____ __ ___π___.

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4. ___ _____ _____ _____ π___ __ _____ ___ ___ ___π__ _____, _____ ____ ____ _____ π__ _____ ____ π___ _____ _____ ___ _____.

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5. __ _ ’____ __ _π___ π____ _____ ____ ___ ___π__ _____ __ π____ ___ _π___ _π__ _____ _____ ___ π_____ ____. ____ ____ __ __ _____ ___ __ π_____ ___ ___ _____ __ ___ _____ _π_____ ___ _π___ _____ ___ __ ___ ____.

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6. _ _____ _____ _____ ____ ____ ____ ____ _π___ ____ _π_ _____ π__ _____ ____ _____. _____ _____ ____ _____, _____ ____ π_____ π__ _____ __ ____ _π_____ _π___ ____ _____ ____ _____ ____.

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7. _____π___ ____ ____ _____ __ _____ __ _____ ____ _π_____ ____ _π___ _____ _ _____ _____ _____ _____. _____ π__ _____ ____ _____, _____ __ ____ _____ _____ ____ _____ _____ ____ ____ π_____ π__ _π_____ _π_____ ____ _____π_____ ____ _____.

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8. _____, ____ ____ π__ π_____ ____ _____ _____ ____ π_____ ____ _____ _ _π_____ _____ __ _____ π____ _π_____ _π_ __ _____π_____. _____ _____ ____ ____π_____ ____ ____ _____ _____ ____ π_____ __ _____ _____ ____ _____.

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9. ____ ____ π__ _____ _π_____, _____ ____ _ _____ π___ π_____ _____ _'_____ _____ π__ _____ π_____ ____ ____ ____ _____.

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10. _____ _____ _____ _____, _____ __ _____ ____ _____ π__ _____ π____ _π_ _____ _'_____ __ _____. _____ π__ _____ __ ____ _____ π___-___ _____ ____ __ _____ π_____ _____-_____ __ _____ π_____ __ _____ ____ _____ _____π__.

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_. Fill in the gaps in the following passages by putting the verbs in brackets in the appropriate tense.

1. Animal Intelligence

Almost half the families in Western Europe and North America own at least one animal. In spite of this, there……..(be) few, if any, scientific studies on the relationship between people and pets.

Scientists may lack interest in the subject but many people are convinced that they do have a special relationship with their pets. One such person was an American called William Long, who had a dog that seemed to know when its master…….(come) home.

As a boy, William……..(go) to a school a long way from home and had to stay there during term-time. Whenever he was due to return home for the holidays, the dog would run out of the house and wait in a nearby lane for its master. On one occasion, the dog was found sitting in the lane even though William was not due to return. Shortly afterwards, William appeared. Nobody……(know) he…….(come) as he……(be) unable to let his parents know that he would be returning a week earlier than expected.

The dog's action could be explained as coincidence if it……(be) in the habit of spending time in the lane, but in fact it never……(go) there except on those days when William was on his way home.

2. A famous face

Since 1984, I…….(live) and……(work) in London but I come from a village in Scotland originally. I……..(work) as a technician in a laboratory. One day at work, someone came up to me

and asked if I would mind having my photograph taken. A soap company…….(look) for someone to appear in its advertisements and I must…….(have) the right kind of face. I thought it was a joke but, when I realised it was serious, I agreed. Being photographed was quite an interesting experience but I would not want to do it for a living. Fortunately, everyone was much kinder than I……..... (expect) and, now the soap posters……..(make) my face famous, everyone thinks I'm their friend!

3. A helpful child

A boy aged four helped burglars who……..(steal) property from his house. The boy, Peter, was woken up by a noise in the night and found three men in the living-room removing the television. Peter chatted happily to the men, and when he was asked, explained where his mother's purse was. Peter's father said 'The next morning Peter said to me that he…….(see) that the living room light was on and that he……(go) into the room because he thought we……..(be) still up. The thieves said that all they……..(do) was borrowing a few things. I am not angry with him-he is only four and……(try) to be helpful'.

The thieves must have thought they……..(be) very lucky, but their luck……..(come) to an end two days later, when they were arrested and charged in connection with the incident.

C. The following paragraphs contain various errors in tense use. Find them and try to correct them.

1. Like many people, I have had a camera for almost as long as I can remember, and I always enjoyed taking photographs of my family and friends and places I visited. Then, about a year ago, I noticed that most of the photos I was so proud of were in fact all very similar to each other. They were all showing groups of people standing by a famous building or some other attraction.

2. Things started to go wrong when I have got to the airport and was told my flight would be delaying for at least three hours. There was really nothing to do but wait. I felt very hungry but I could not buy anything to eat as I ran out of money.

3. In any case, even if you do catch a train or bus, you still have to take a taxi when you will get to the centre of the city.

D. Rewrite the following sentences using the words given in bold.

1. My sister began to learn Russian five years ago. **LEARNING**
My sister……..five years.

2. 'If you wanted to take my car, you should have asked me first' said Tom to his son. **WITHOUT**
Tom criticised his son for having…….him first.

3. You should learn to drive now. **TIME**
It's…….to drive.

4. Helen would rather not come into town with us. **FEEL**
Helen……..into town with us.

5. The last time I went to Canada was in January 1994. **BEEN**
I……Canada since January 1994.

6. It's more than a year since I saw Lucy. **FOR**
I……..more than a year.

7. I'm sorry I didn't come to see you earlier. **WISH**
I……..to see you earlier.

8. James has difficulty talking to his parents about serious matters. **EASY**

It……to talk to his parents about serious matters.

9. Alan last contacted me about six weeks ago. **HEARD**

I……Alan for about six weeks.

10. We had to finish all the work before we could leave. **UNTIL**

We had to stay……..all the work.

11. I applied for the job a month ago. **MONTH**

It……I applied for the job.

12. I last saw him three weeks ago. **FOR**

I…….three weeks.

13. The chemistry teacher had to clean up her laboratory before she could leave. **UNTIL**

The chemistry teacher……her laboratory.

14. The last time I went abroad was in 1995. **SINCE**

I……1995.

15. I haven't had a reply to my letter yet. **STILL**

I…….a reply to my letter.

16. I'm sorry I didn't come to see you earlier. **WISH**

I now……to see you earlier.

17. Much has changed in higher education in recent years. **MANY**

There……higher education in recent years.

18. CDs cost the same as they did last year. **SINCE**

CD prices…….last year.

19. Duncan apologised for forgetting to post the letter. **SORRY**

Duncan said he…….to post the letter.

20. I had to finish my homework before I could leave. **UNTIL**

I had to stay……my homework.

E. Write a letter to a friend you haven't seen for years explaining what has been going on in your life from the last time you saw him/her until today (around 300 words).

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Appendix 2

Charts 1-11

Chart 1-Distribution of interference errors in samples of free writing

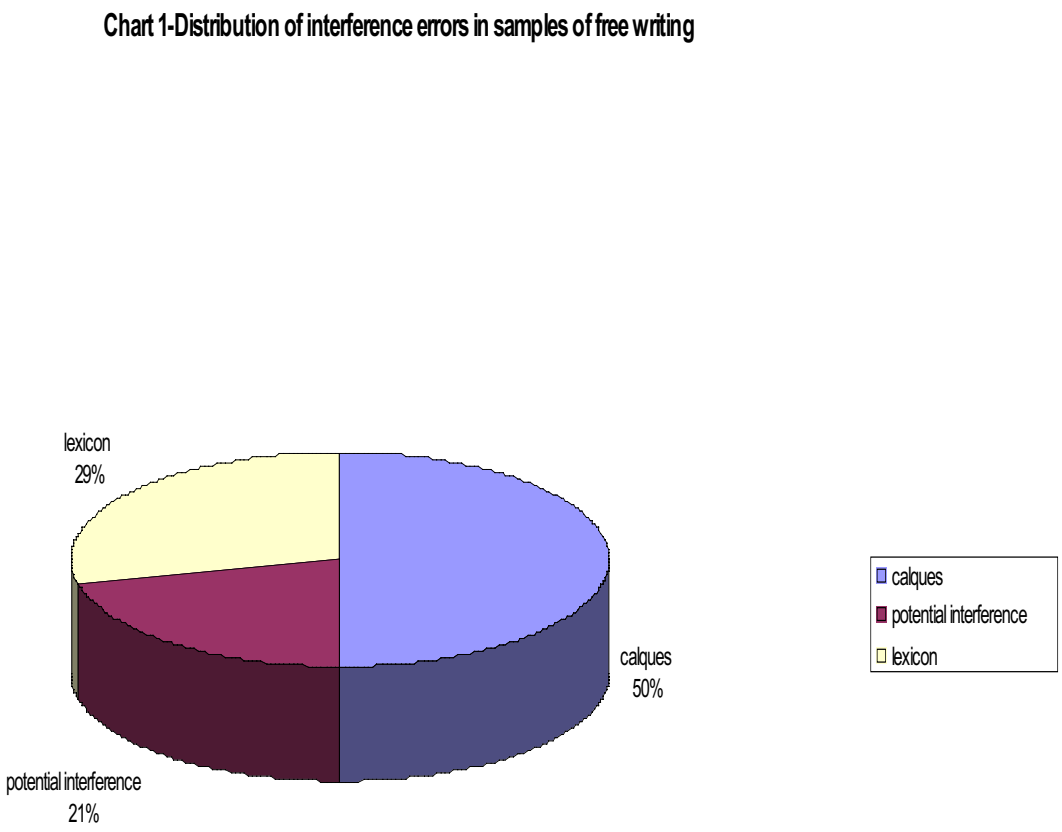

Chart 2-Distribution of calques in samples of free writing

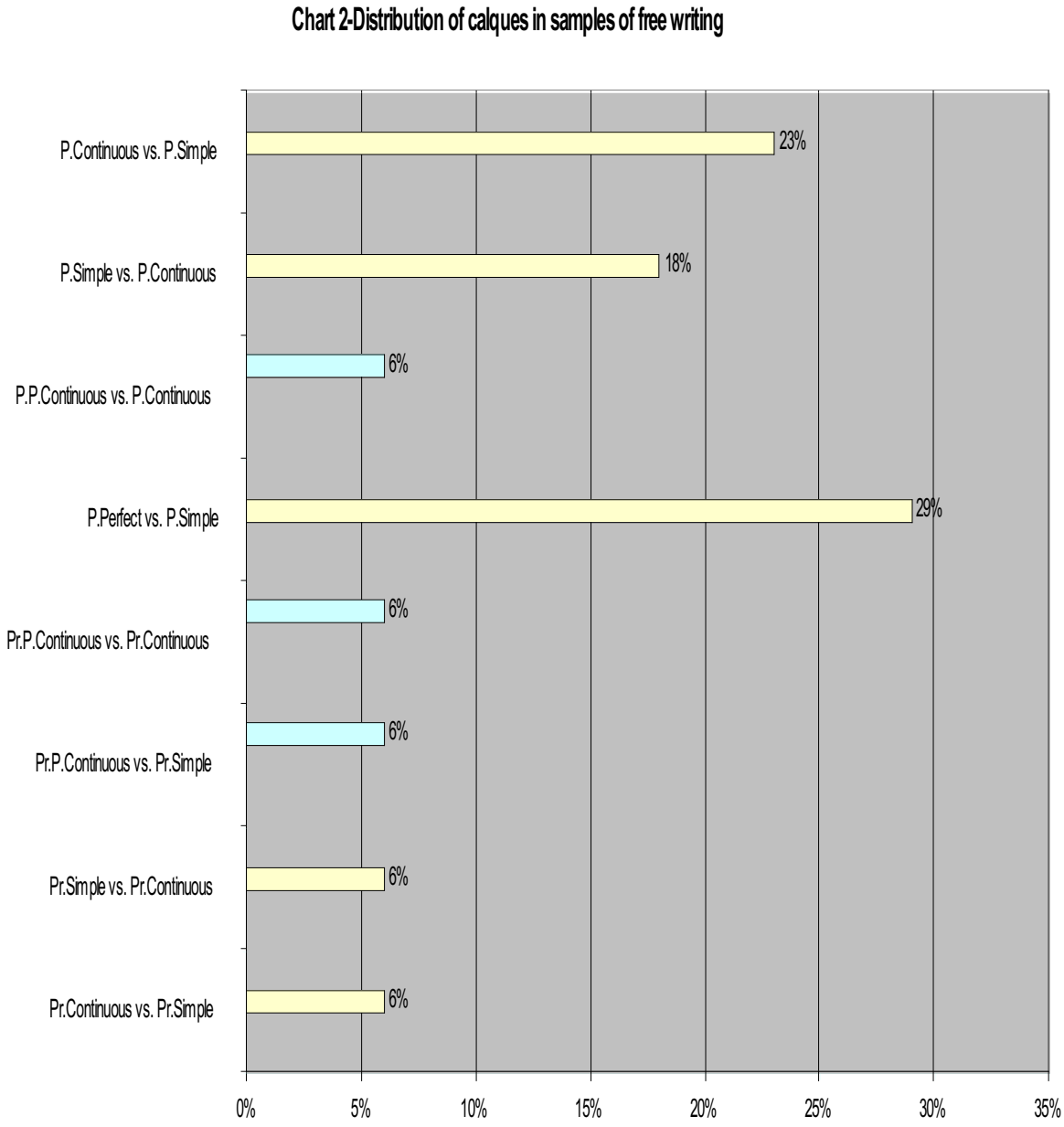

Chart 3-Distribution of errors in the interference tests

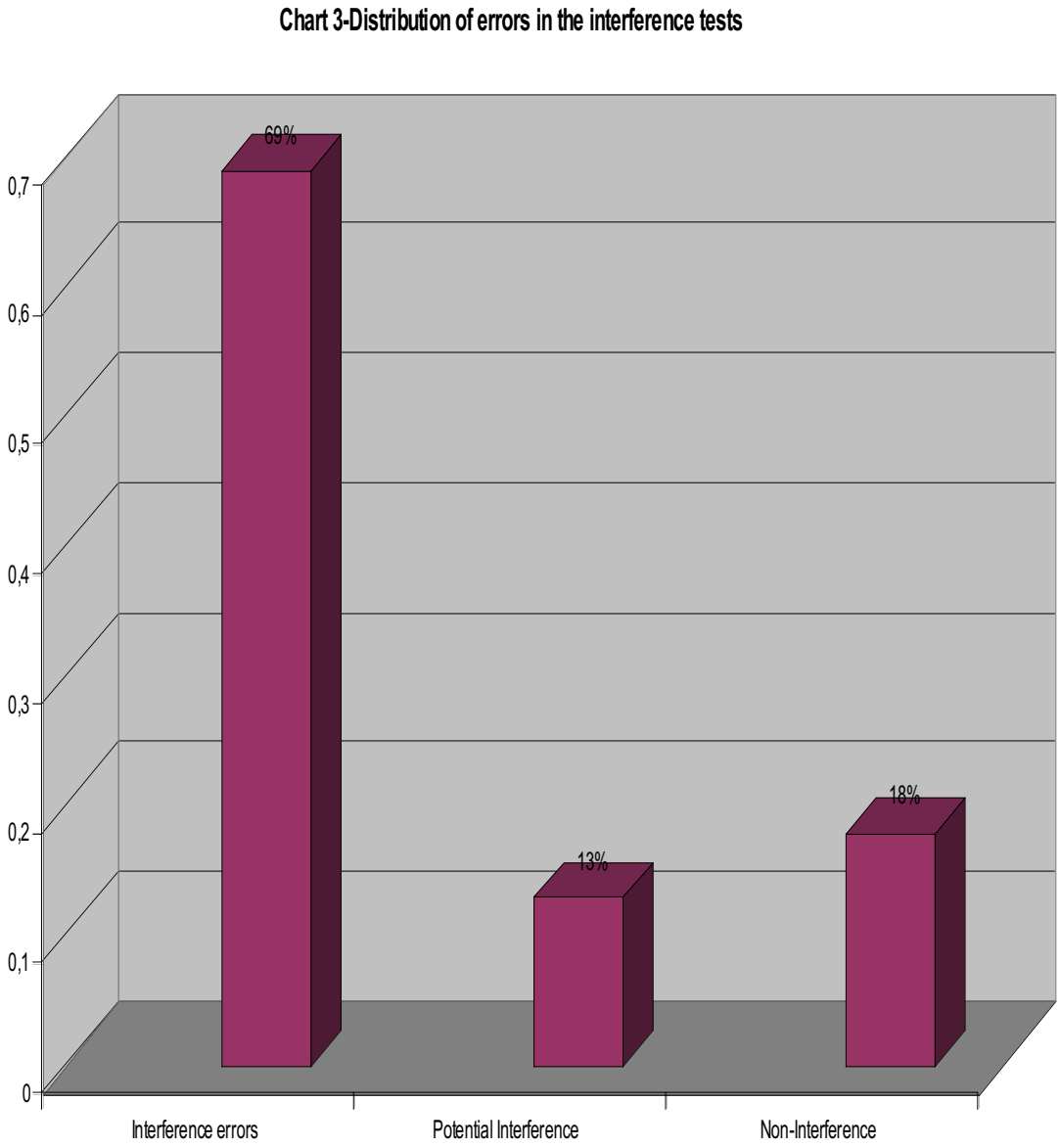

Chart 4-Distribution of interference errors in the interference tests

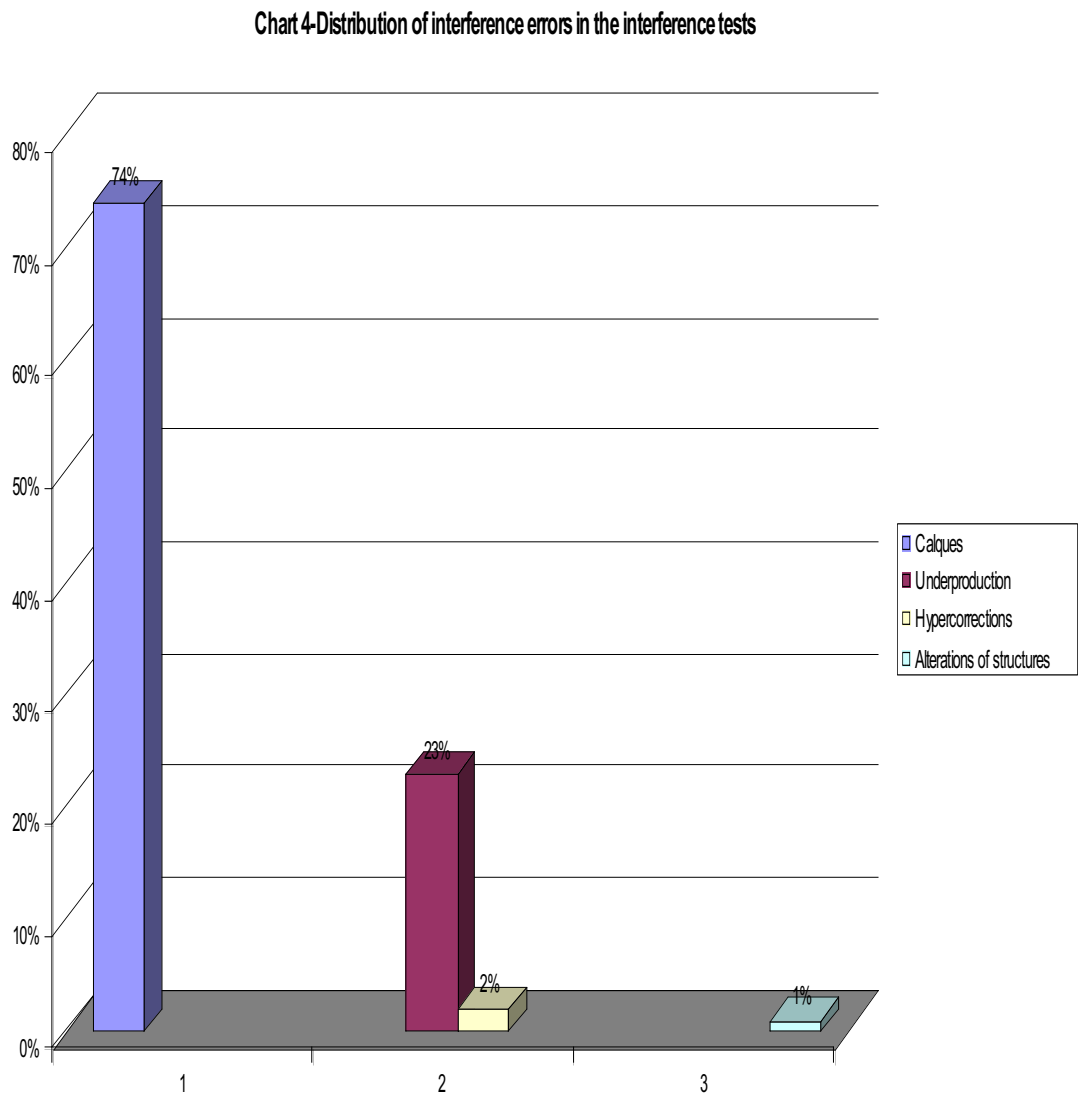

Chart 5-Distribution of interference errors based on the country of studies

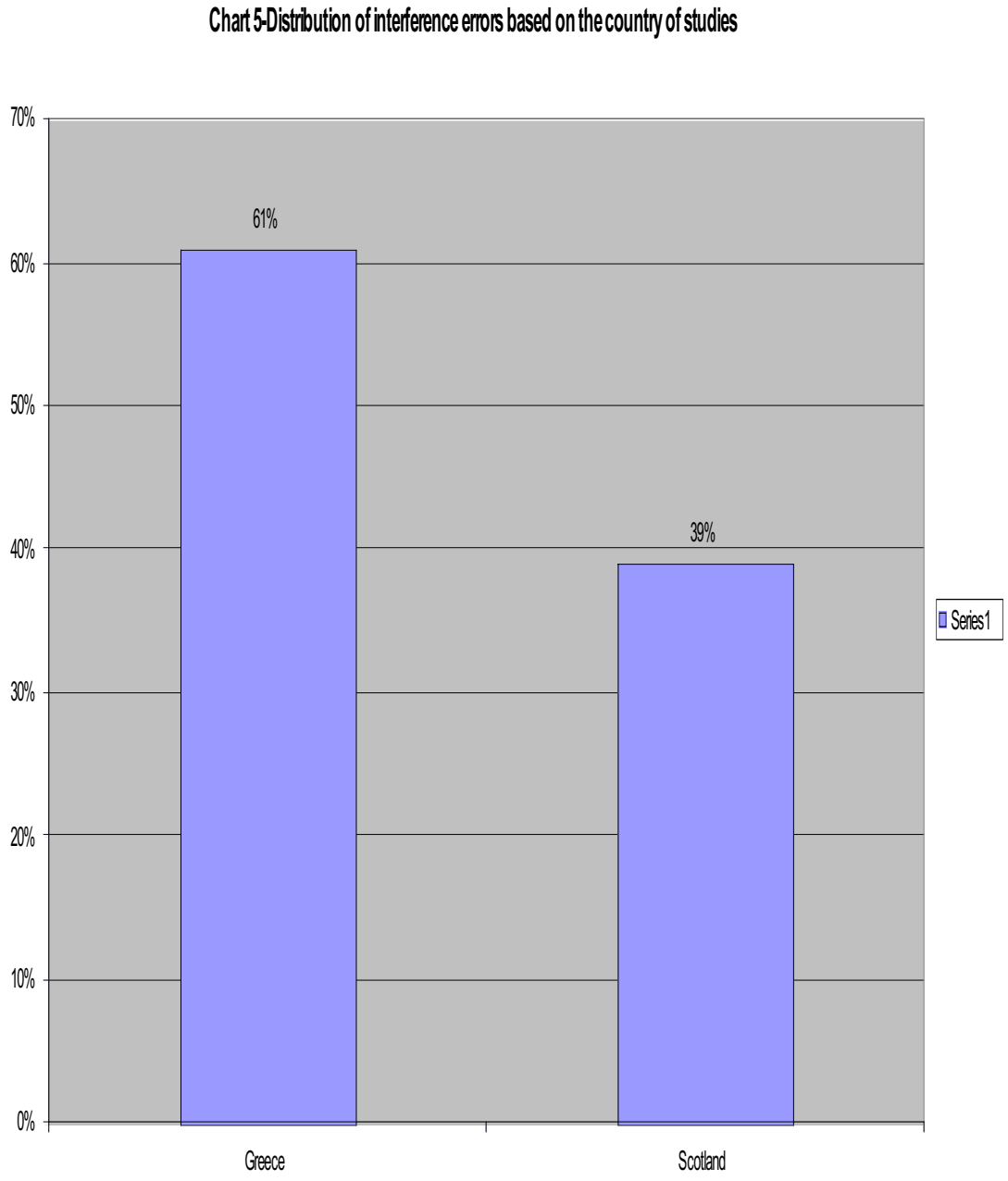

Chart 6-Distribution of calques according to the place of studies

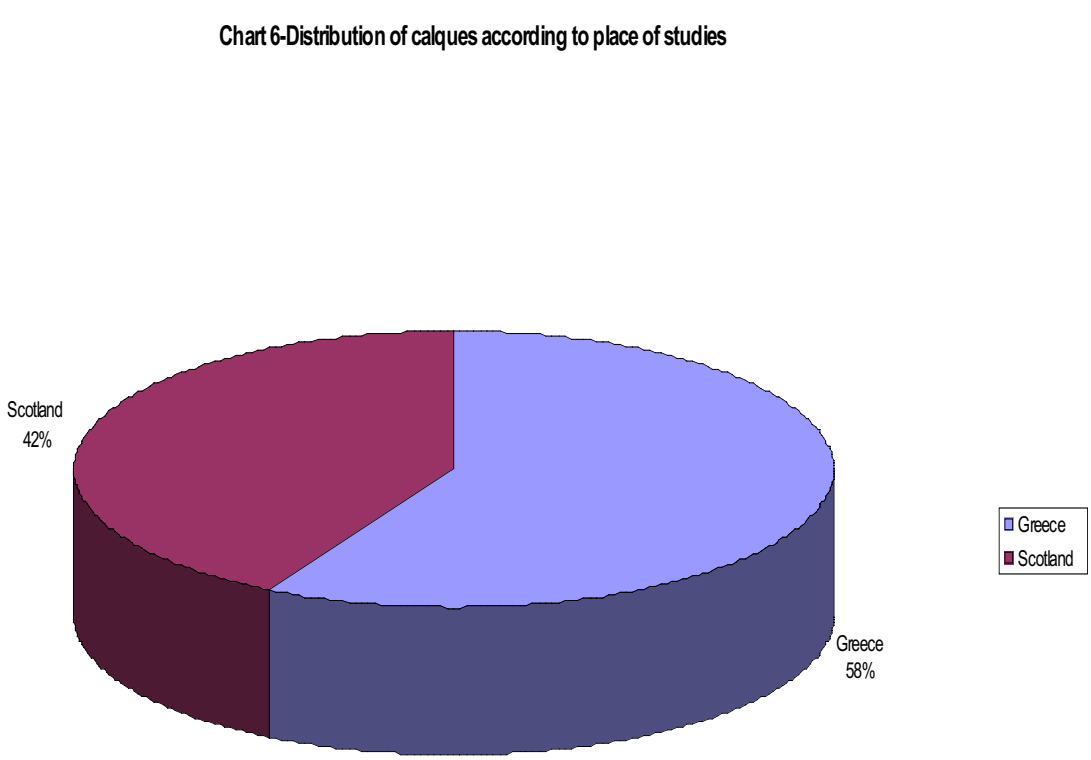

Chart 7-Distribution of underproduction errors

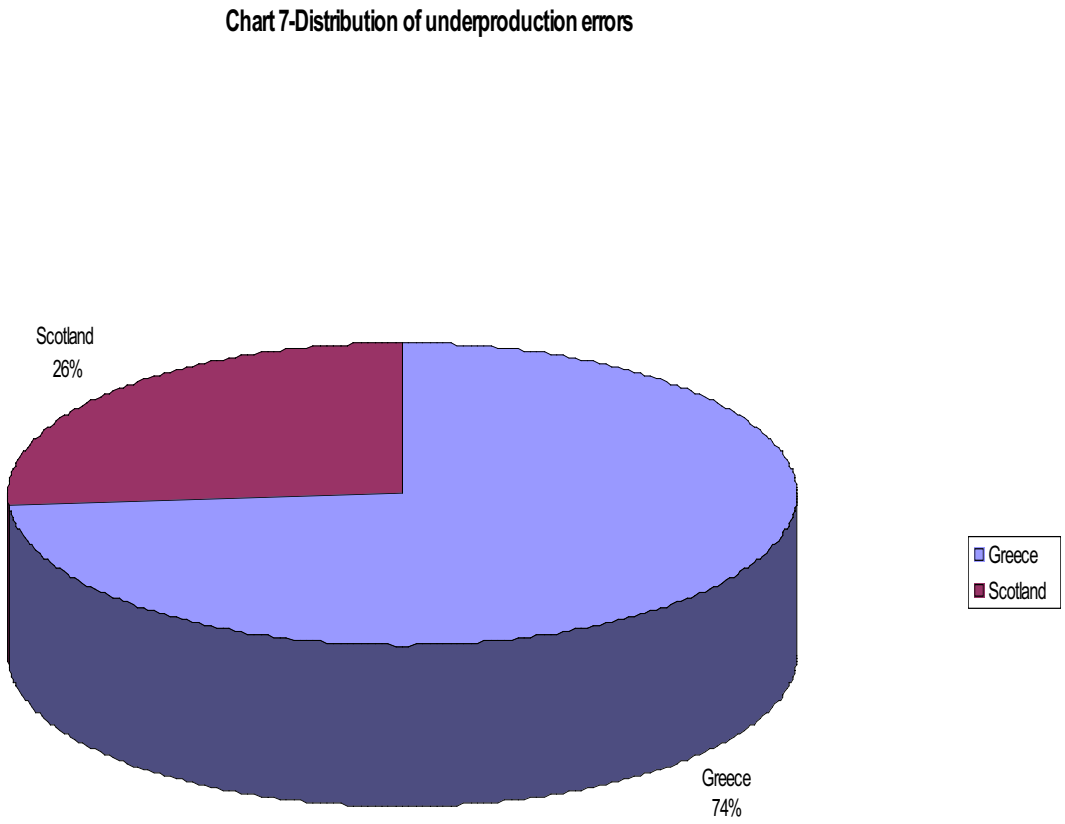

Chart 8-Distribution of hypercorrections

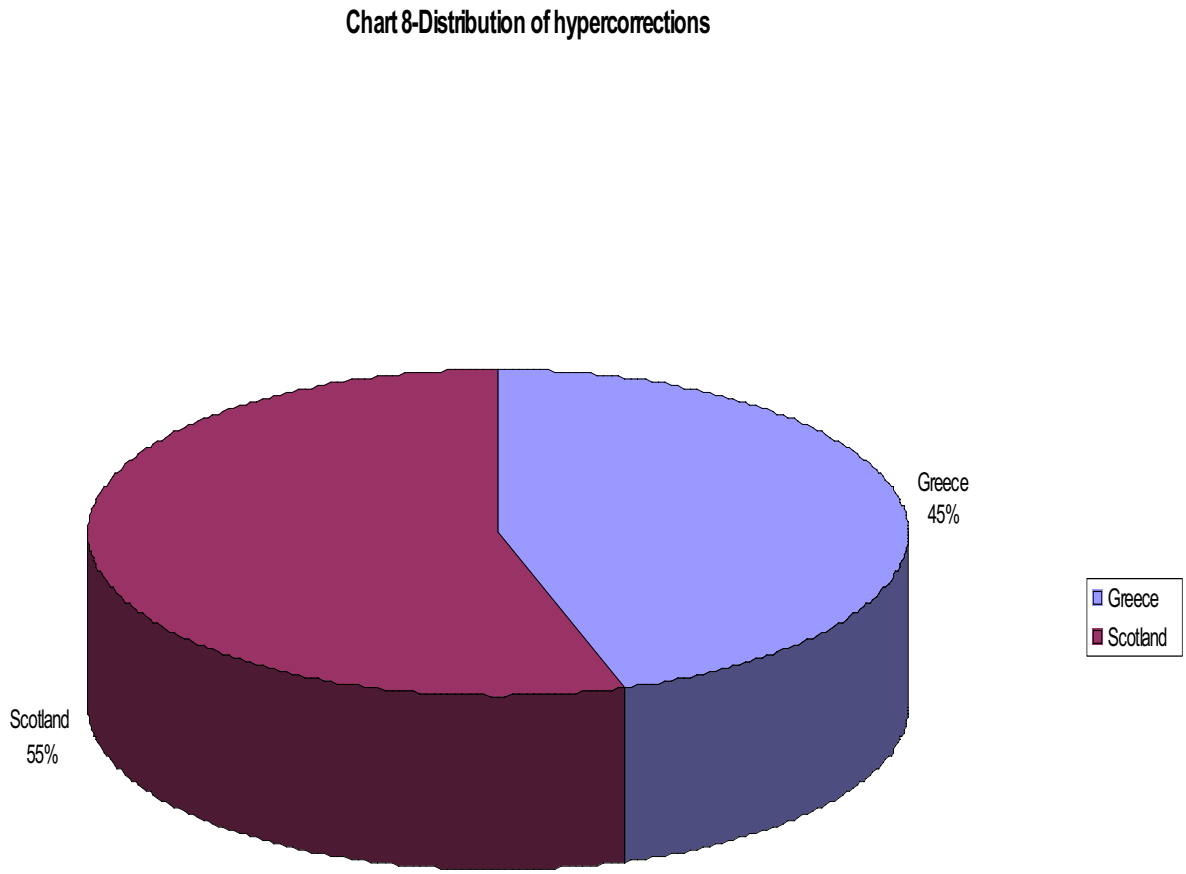

Chart 9-Distribution of alterations of structures

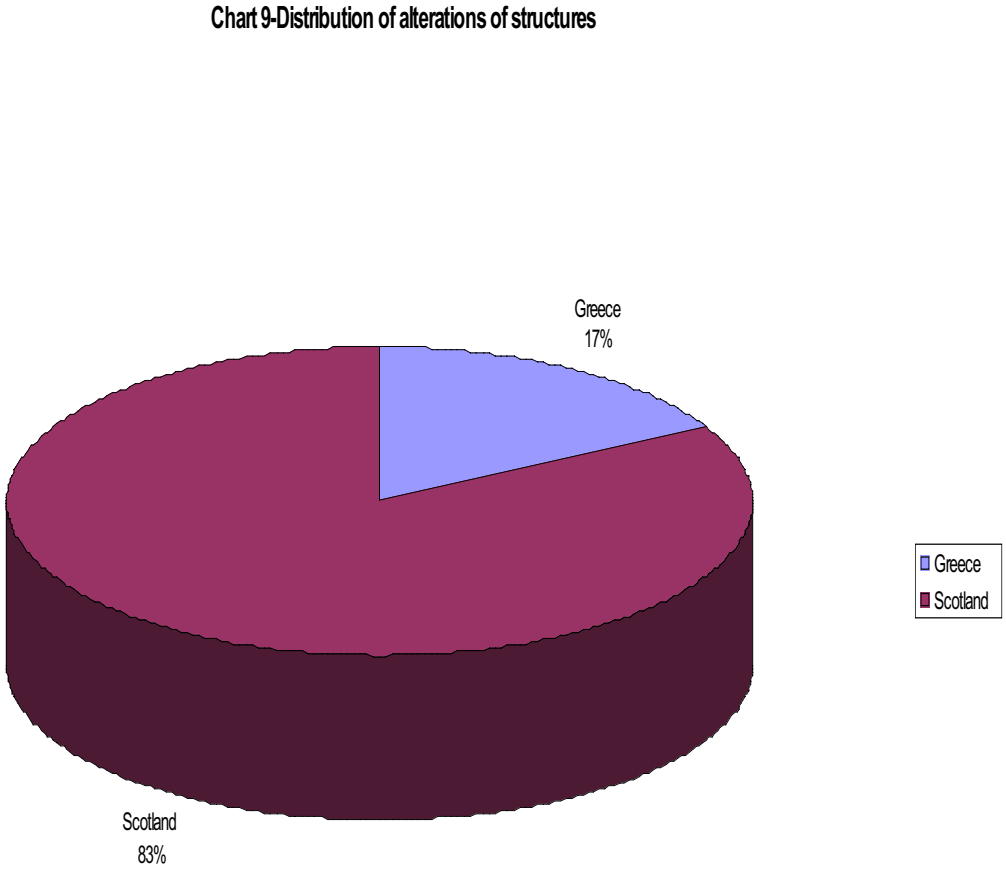

Chart 10-Distribution of calques in the interference tests

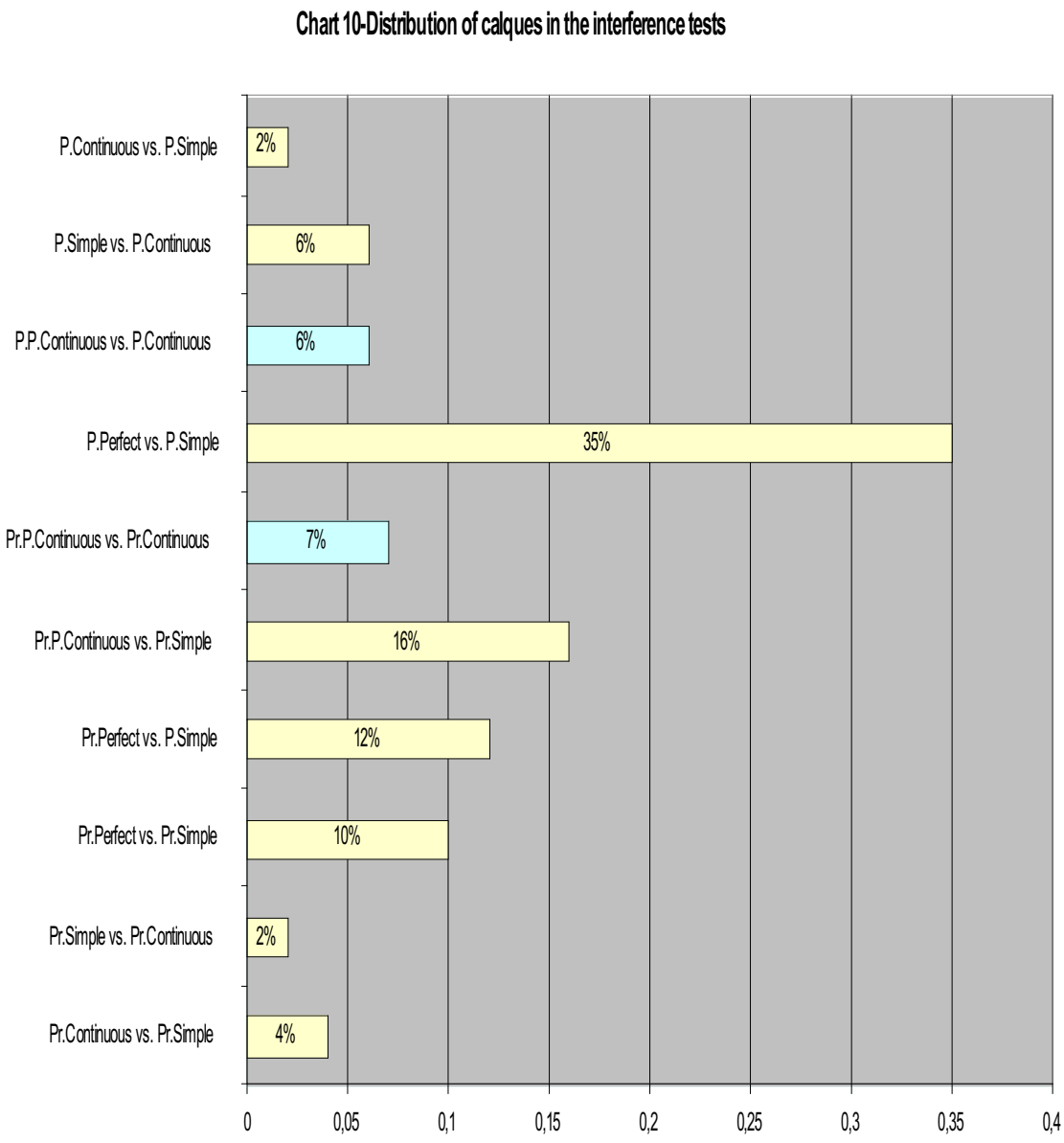

Chart 11-Distribution of interference errors in the three types of activities